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FIFTEEN WESTERN TALES

15 STORIES 25 CENTS

VOLUME 24, No. 1



MAY, 1951

Two Big Novels

1. **THREE FOR HELL**.....*George C. Appell* 16
There are three ways to hell—a rope, a knife and a gun—and Spanish Sam learned them all!
2. **REBEL HORSES SOUTH**.....*Lance Kermit* 92
"I'm a rebel sure—an' I go the whole way for my outfit. Treason an' be damned!"
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Smashing Western Fiction

3. **FAST TROUBLE MAN**.....*Dee Linford* 37
"You can cross a desert with hosses, mister—but you cross a man with your gun!"
4. **SUDDEN SLEEP BULLET**.....*Charles Blakeman* 44
A gun is good for just two things—to hang by a man . . . or to hang a man by!
5. **DEATH IN THE SUN**.....*Day Keene* 55
For one more night the hell-raising ghosts of Showdown came to thunderous life. . .
6. **BRAND OF THE WILD ONES**.....*Damon Knight* 64
There's a brand no man may wear on his face—and live!
7. **LAST GUN TO OGALLALA**.....*Cliff Farrell* 70
"Easy livin' and quick-killin'" was what men said of Clay Thorne—but dying, he found, came hard!
8. **I'LL DIG A GRAVE**.....*Kenneth Fowler* 78
"It takes two to make a killing—and my gun to make it yours!"
9. **THE KILLER**.....*Frank Bonham* 85
A steer can throw a man a whole lot farther than a man can throw the bull. . .

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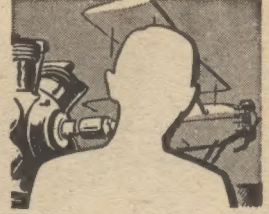
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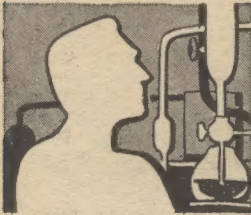
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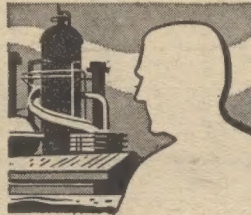
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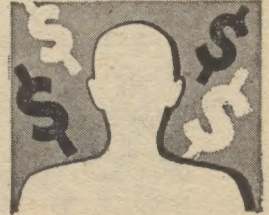
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● ON THE TRAIL ●



LIGHT down, gents, and we'll palaver a while. We've reserved this space for our readers who are top hands in informing us about matters Western. There's no truth more stranger-than-fiction than in the tales about the men who tamed the West. Before we begin our drive, we'd like to ask the gals to share the reins in our story swapping.

Now here's a story from a pardner who'd like us to know about the weapon mightier than a gun.

Dear Editor:

Gun courage was common in old San Francisco, and fatal duels barely rated a stick of type in the newspapers. If any authorities felt the death rate was unusually high, there wasn't much they could do about it. But in the early '50's, two duelling citizens outraged even California's easy going justice.

Instead of pumping lead at each other, they proclaimed they would fight with swords. A girl was the cause of their quarrel, a pretty little immigrant from France. In her honor, they meant to scrap it out old-world style, winner to get the lady.

It was too much. Public opinion was against it. It was illegal, said the courts, for a man to get killed with a sword in California. The duel was forbidden. But the two lovesick, headstrong hombres—two against the law, as it were—snuck across the bay one dawn, to Oakland, where they were less likely to be noticed. With a pair of rusty old sabers they'd found in a waterfront store, they hacked gleefully away until one of them dropped to his knees, mortally wounded.

The survivor was not charged with murder. For one thing, the little French girl refused to marry him after all. For another, there are crimes so bizarre that it is punishment enough to have committed them. California preferred to forget the whole episode.

Myron Nelson
Los Angeles, Cal.

The Old West had its mottos—for better or for worse.

Dear Editor:

Whitewash the memory of Abilene! It was not so wicked at its worst as song and story insist. For the town had a motto, adopted shortly after it sprang into being as the trail's-end of the cattle drive from Texas. And if that motto was honored more in the breach than the observance, it was not the townsfolks' fault. They kept their motto, through shootings, lynchings, and sheriffs who were wanted in other counties by other sheriffs.

The legend was PURITY AND PEACE!
ABILENE!

Sam Fisher
Boston, Mass.

Here's a tale that the Lone Star State never tires of telling. You'll be doing the same.

Dear Editor:

His name was Saunders, and no one remembers him any more. Later, he carried a gun, and fought in the war between the

(Continued on page 8)

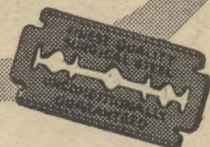
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(Continued from page 6)

states, but he made his mark of glory the year he was seventeen, a lanky gray-eyed Texan kid, unarmed. He made his mark, but the mark was made in water.

All the older men had left the backcountry to fight for the Confederacy. Word came through that Lee's men lacked for beef—a message that called for action on a Texan's part. The kid rounded up eleven hundred head of longhorn, and headed for New Orleans. Before he got there, he heard that the port had fallen to the Yankees. The South had been driven east of the Mississippi, and all the crossings were in the hands of the North.

That was when the kid made his mark. Only one point was left unguarded, where the river ran forty feet deep and a mile wide. He had a horse that could swim, and he guessed the longhorns could swim. He swam them across—the wettest Texas cowboy that ever herded cattle on a trail. All but a hundred reached the eastern shore.

They still can show you the Chisholm Trail, and its end in Abilene, but no one can show you the strangest trail of all, the one that the Texas kid blazed through the Mississippi, to reach Mobile, for a licked and vanishing cause.

John Stephens
St. Louis, Missouri

Silver prospecting made a "Treasure Island" out of the West. It also made a fool's paradise.

Dear Editor:

Sam Conger was the luckiest tenderfoot ever to look for silver in Colorado—and, also, the stupidest and the bravest. He came West as a young man, his head filled with dreams of a shining gray metal, and with nothing else. His earliest prospecting days in the Rocky Mountains were enough to convince him that the only visible silver in the wilderness was the property of the Arapaho Indians. The fact that they also collected white men's scalps might have deterred a wiser man than Sam Conger from fraternization.

He made friends with Bird Chief, the biggest top-piece and silver trinket man in the tribe. Over many a firewater session, he spoke of his dreams of wealth and begged for information. But Bird Chief would only point expansively to the Rocky Mountains in general, and murmur, "Catch big silver in big mountain that way."

Sam spoke privately to Bird Chief's daughter, pretty little Moaning Dove. "You are so beautiful," he said. "Which one is Silver Mountain?"

"The one where the storms come from," Moaning Dove admitted. Sam didn't know

any meteorology, so she promised to lead him to the spot. It was to be an elopement. But Bird Chief got wind of the plans, and Sam just managed to get out of the Arapaho village with his hair on.

It was fool's luck.

He was broke, friendless, alone in the wilderness, but there was one big compensation—he wasn't aware of it. He thought of himself as a potential millionaire, and still didn't bother using his pick and shovel, as other prospectors did. Instead, he wandered the hill trails, asking everyone he met which mountain the storms came from.

Someone told him at last that one particular peak seemed to have worse weather than the others, so he went there. All he found was a lot of scrub timber and funny-looking black rock. It took the heart out of him. He gave up his dream, went back to Denver, and lived there on odd jobs for the next eight years.

One day, he saw a box spill off a freight car and break open. Although nothing was inside it but a lot of black rocks, the guards scooped it up, guns drawn, like men scurrying for treasure. He asked what was so wonderful about a lot of old black rocks, and the guards, possibly not quite believing that anyone in Denver was that ignorant, told him it was silver ore.

He had seen rocks like that before—and the sight had broken his heart.

He hadn't known silver doesn't come polished and shining from the ground, ready for the picking.

He had found his dream—eight years before.

But he hadn't known it.

The treasure still was waiting for him, unclaimed, when he hurried back to it. However, Sam was beginning to understand that he had more luck than sense. He sold out, for a sizeable sum, and went home. The lode he had discovered and ignored and rediscovered yielded twenty million dollars in silver before it played out. A big find to turn your back on, for lack of one little fact.

Stephen Tarta
Little Rock, Ark.

Which brings us to the end of the trail for this time, gents. We hope you enjoy these stories as much as we enjoy bringing them to you. If you know of some incident in the true history of the Old West that you think other readers would enjoy, follow the lead of your trailmates and send it along to us, won't you? Until we meet at trailside again, Adios!

—THE EDITORS



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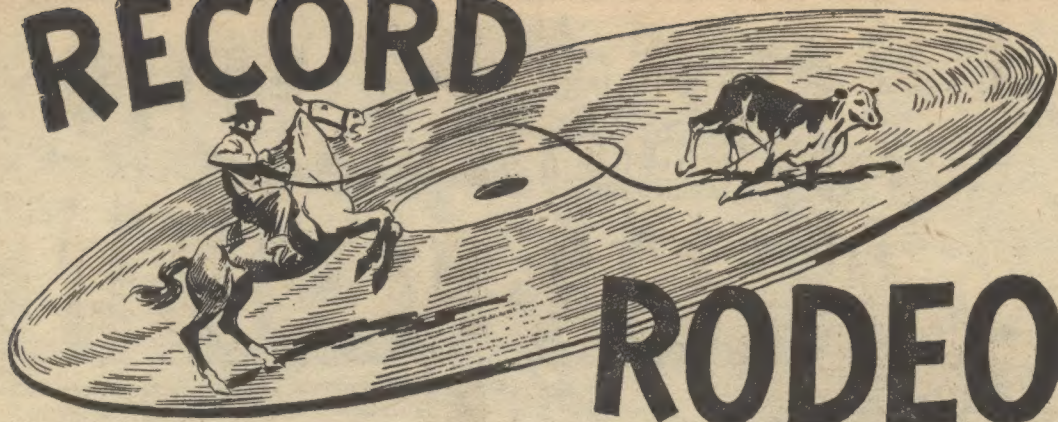
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RODEO

By Joey Sasso

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HOWDY, ladies and gents! You better get your tune changer ready in a hurry. We've got a stock of Western sides to tell you about that will make you jump in the saddle. Our Western tune-totters have done some mighty special recording and we've lassoed the best for you. Let the spinning start with a top notch disc by the Sons Of The Pioneers who have a message for you.

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WHERE ARE YOU

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I'LL FIND YOU

**REMEMBER ME I'M THE ONE WHO
LOVES YOU**

**ELTON BRITT AND THE SKYTOPPERS
(RCA Victor)**

Seldom do two songs by one composer hit
10

at the same time as do the Stuart Hamblen tunes projected in this RCA Victor cutting by Elton Britt. Both are slow, sweet ballads sung with unaffected simplicity and sincerity by Elton Britt. The second is a you-can-depend-on-me-tune in which Elton pledges he'll always be there. The Skytoppers provide orchestral backing.

**THE RED WE WANT IS THE RED
WE'VE GOT IN THE OLD RED,
WHITE AND BLUE**

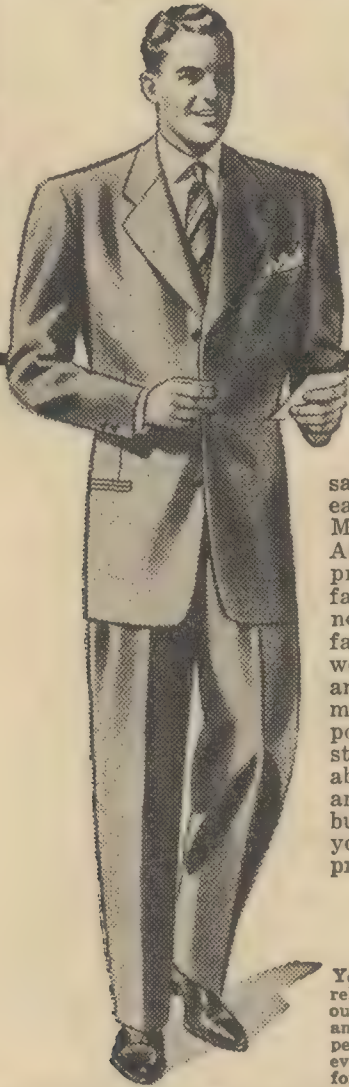
**THERE'S A STAR-SPANGLED BANNER
WAVING SOMEWHERE**

**ELTON BRITT AND THE SKYTOPPERS
(RCA Victor)**

Elton Britt's famous RCA Victor rendition of *There's A Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere*, his best seller and one of the first Hillbilly songs to sell over a million records, is cogently coupled with the new patriotic payoff, *The Red We Want Is the Red We've Got*, launched recently in a Ralph Flanagan facsimile. Elton is meltin' hearts again with the same unadorned sincerity of style that distinguished its plat-termate, *There's a Star-Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere*. The clarion call of a

(Continued on page 12)

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(Continued from page 10)

trumpet adds some patriotic flourishes.

**SILVER RIVER
PROUD LITTLE HEART
DUSTY WALKER
(Columbia)**

A lonesome sort of Western song is attractively presented by Dusty Walker in a moderate tempo ballad with romantic overtones, sung to a pretty string orchestra-backing. On the flip side, Dusty sings a jaunty song of a heart that refuses to admit it was wrong.

**DADDY'S LAST LETTER
ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS
TEX RITTER
(Capitol)**

Topside is Private First Class John J. McCormick's last letter to his family, which was printed in newspapers from coast-to-coast. McCormick gave his life on the Korean front. Ritter delivers the recitation with great sensitivity and dignity, with organ background. Reverse is a standard familiar to everyone.

**HUMPTY DUMPTY BOOGIE
DADDY BLUES
HANK THOMPSON
(Capitol)**

Thompson takes top side at bright tempo, and it's reminiscent of his big Western songs, with instrumental accompaniment. Hank also does a bang-up job on the reverse with his guitar featured. Hank is the composer of both these folk tunes.

**WILD CARD
TAMBURITZA BOOGIE
TEX WILLIAMS
(Capitol)**

Folk artist Williams sings on both biscuits. Bonnie Lake and Buddy Ebsen wrote the topside. The flipover is a song featuring the unique Tamburitza—an old Yugoslavian instrument, cross between guitar and banjo. Tex projects both sides with a lot of verve, inimitable style.

**TATER PIE
I DIDN'T REALIZE
BOB WILLS AND HIS TEXAS
PLAYBOYS
(MGM)**

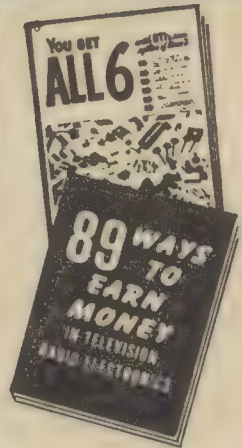
The Ol' Master, Bob Wills, is in top form on his latest M-G-M-er, topping everything he's sent our way on records in months! And, that's a statement that promises one humdinger of a record, you'll agree! On the "A" side, Bob and The Playboys have themselves some fun with a brisk-tempoed, square-dancey toe-tapper. If you're a steady Wills fan, you know that Bob is always getting something new for his recording dates. That's true here with the new Play-boy Trio adding their voices to that of Jack Loyd for a grand vocal. When they're not singing, a real sagebrush jam-session, with plenty of hot solos, takes place. On this score, we'd suggest a bit of extra attention to the hot fiddle bit; it represents Bob's first playing on records in years! On the other side, there's no let-down to the fast pace as the boys work over another snappy item. Good instrumental solos here, too, and Bob's running "commentary" is one of the funniest he's ever recorded.

**SEARCHING FOR YOU, BUDDY
PRAIRIE
RED RIVER DAVE WITH THE TEXAS
TOPHANDS
(MGM)**

Red River Dave puts plenty of heart and feeling into this first side, a touching new tune of his own composition, giving it the free and easy sort of performance his legions of fans go for. It's so good, matter of fact, that we wouldn't be surprised if Dave doubled his following with this side alone. The other side is all to the good, too, with Dave offering more fine singing on another rich new tune from his own pen. The lyric here is an unusual one, giving this number almost as much hit potential as its immediately-appealing disc-mate!

Well, folks, that about rounds up our record rodeo for this month. You won't run off the trail on any of these Western tunes, we think. Keep your tune changer warmed-up for us. We'll be riding your way this time next month to bring you another stack of top-notch disks. Until then, so long, pardner.

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BLOOD IN THE SIERRAS

Out of their dead yesterdays they rode, the phantom raiders of Sierra Madres, led by a scalp-hungry chieftain—spawned by the race he hated!

By M. KANE



They set up headquarters just over the Mexican border. . . .

THE Old West, with its grandeur and terrors, is less remote than popular imagination guesses. It didn't peter out tamely with your grandfather's youth. There were scalplings and Indian raids on this continent until almost the outbreak of World War II. They were the work of the ghost Apaches of the Sierra Madres, a small, die-hard group that refused to surrender with Geronimo's bloody band in the 80's.

First inkling of their existence reached civilization more than sixty years ago. A New Mexican stagecoach driver, on a routine route that was already considered monotonously safe, came across an overturned buckboard, its horses shot to death, and its human occupants, a man and woman, defunct in the peculiarly horrible way that could only mean Apaches.

The dead were identified as a Judge McComas and his wife. Friends declared that the couple's little son was missing. It was assumed that he had accompanied his parents on the fatal trip, and a regular military mission was sent out to look for him.

All that could be ascertained was that a gang of Apaches had set up headquarters in the Mexican mountains, just over the border—but that was only by rumor. They never were found. Nor was the child.

But Mexican ranchers knew their handiwork, through the years that followed. In 1919, Senor Francisco Fimbres, goaded by raids on his livestock, led a party of Vigilantes against the ghost riders of the Sier-

ras. His companions searching a wilderness the size of New England, got the same answer that the U.S. militia had found, thirty years earlier—nobody home. Nobody, that is, except a little Indian girl, left behind.

Fimbres, a kindly man, took her home with him, and had her educated in a convent. She presumably made a complete adjustment, and lived happily ever after. But Fimbres didn't. The Apaches had long memories, and tenacity. He would live to regret his charity.

An Arizona prospector swore he saw the elusive redmen, during the '20's. Five of them, silent, marching single file, dressed as no Apache had been dressed within the memory of any but the oldest Westerners.

When curious reporters investigated, there was no trace. But three years later, Fimbres came back to his ranch one evening to find his wife killed and his son vanished. The Apaches had called in.

And then, suddenly, the raids ceased. An old Indian woman drifted down to civilization, and explained that the last of the scalping chieftains was dead. She led a posse to his grave, which was opened.

Medical experts, after examining the body, testified that the most persistent of all the tribesmen hadn't been an Indian at all—the skeleton was a white man's.

It was assumed that he was the missing son of Judge McComas, who had been assassinated by the last Apache chieftain fifty years before.

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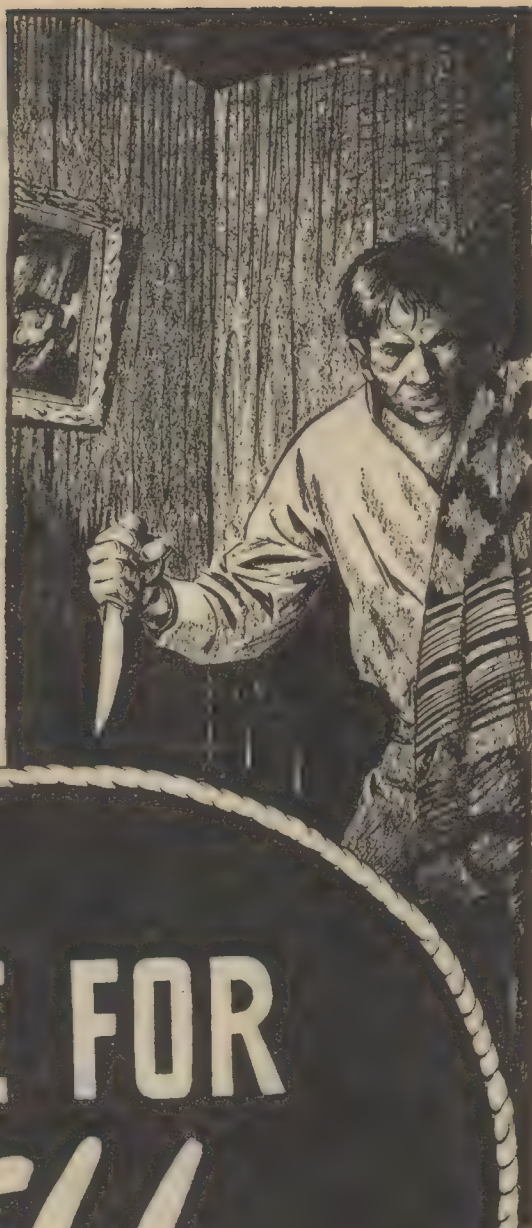
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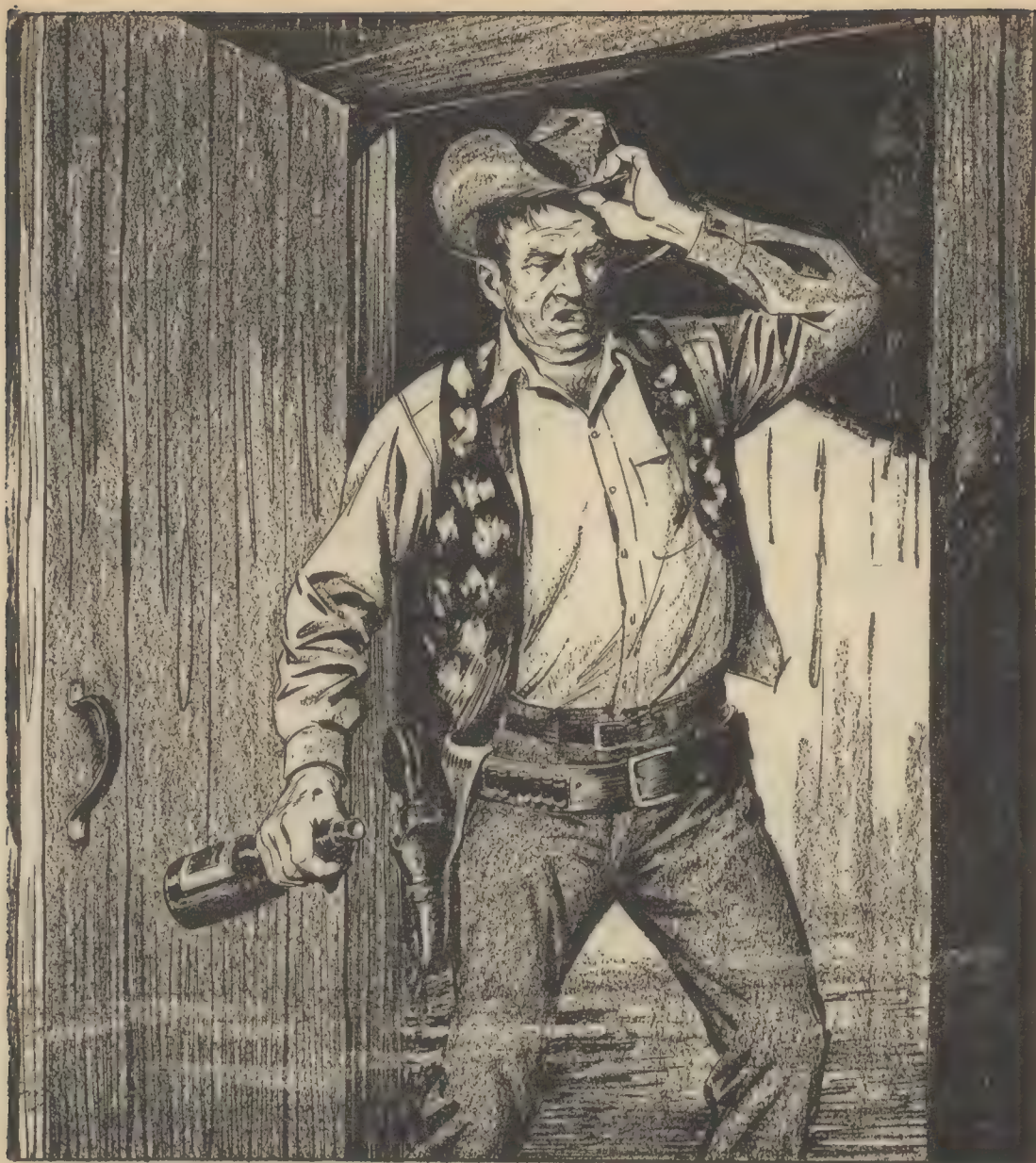
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*There are three ways to hell—
a rope, a knife and a gun—and
Spanish Sam learned them all
that flame-filled night when
death made him its deputy—a
lawman with a price on his head!*

a novel by
**GEORGE C.
APPELL**

A thick, coiled rope forms a large oval border around the title text.

THREE FOR HELL



Sam forced himself against the board wall behind the door,
knife out, knuckles tight. . . .

CHAPTER ONE

Man Hunter

THE six of them were riding three forward and three behind down toward the River Street Bridge with hard intent to rob and maybe kill, and that's why the front three were icy drunk and the rear three loose drunk, for it is necessary to manufacture courage where inherent courage is lacking. Past the sallow shine of store lights they rode and past Perico's Frijoles and past The Old West and onto the ramp of the bridge separating the United States from Mexico.

Rossiter pulled down and backed his bay around and showed the furry mandibles of unshaven jaws to the other five. "You all set now?" His voice was tired from alcohol; he sat his worn saddle like a sack. The trail drive they were waiting to work for wouldn't make up until September and this was only July. Idle desperation had sent them all to this act.

"All set," Tennant whispered. He glanced back once at the dull radiance of the town of La Linea, and hated it. After tonight, they'd show the town a thing or two. They'd buy out Perico just for the pleasure of burning his restaurant down. Maybe they'd burn it down without buying it.

Dorf was savage at the rear three. "You quittin' out?"

"Hell no, s'help us." The other three were bundle stiff, in Dorf's opinion. He didn't know why they'd been included. A six-way split, it meant. Dorf liked things to be like himself—small, hard, quick.

They clubbered across the bridge and down into International Territory and lined out through the Mex side of La Linea and past the corner tiswin shop of Jaime and south toward La Casa Espagna. It was a fat gambling house, one run straight so the tourists would come back. Ever since recent arrival of the railroad, the tourists had been discovering La Linea and its easy ways.

Rossiter drew down a bit and let Tennant and Dorf get on his flanks. He glanced once at Tennant in the silver moon-wash, and wondered how reliable Tennant would be. "Remember like I told you—in fast, make the snatch, and out. Keep your hats down and your kerchiefs high. Anyone moves, air him."

Jouncing closer, little Dorf had an idea. "What 'bout them tourists, too? They got wallets."

"Not time. We can't get recognized." Rossiter's pint and a half of tiswin was riding well in his belly and brain. It puzzled him that he wasn't always this brilliant. The planner, the leader, the commander. Not a trail bum, a saddle tramp.

"Faster!"

Past a tiny 'dobe house, blue in the moonlight and alone on the trail leading south. Tennant thrust his crane-gauntness that way and swung out a thumb.

"Spanish Sam's place. He lives yonder."

Dorf hoarsed, "He got a daughter, no?"

"'Bout middle-teens now." Rossiter winked. "May pay call later."

Dorf spurred forward, keeping up. The square bronze lights of La Casa Espagna were just ahead. Some buckboards and surreys were in front, and that meant tourists. He meant to pluck him a tourist and have some of that sweet eastern folding money. Elation leapt through him. "Middle 'teens, huh?" He didn't care about the following three any longer. He was looking ahead . . .

Spanish Sam hoped La Casa Espagna would close early tonight. He wanted to go home to his little 'dobe and maybe taste wine with his fat wife and maybe hear his little boy's prayers and maybe talk awhile to Maria. Someday maybe he'd own his own place and could close up when he wanted to; maybe he'd make enough money to send his young Maria down to the City to school.

He wandered past the gaming tables, clean rag in one hand, flicking at dust. He filled a drink order. He emptied two spittoons. He made change for a man in a beaver hat. The man was accompanied by a lady with tightly-piled hair and a deep-bosomed gown that dropped to a choke-fit around her ankles.

Elegant, thought Spanish Sam, yet he pitied them. What they came for was a show of violence and all they got was a gentle fleecing. It didn't make sense.

The man in the beaver hat and the lady in the tight gown turned in their shortened stacks of whites and took cash. "Reckon we'll get back across the bridge," the man was saying. Another couple nodded. The trade started for the doors, laughing with the uneasy mirth of people who came to win and who are embarrassed because they did not.

Spanish Sam held the doors for them, bowing. He accepted a tip. He went back past the tables, disturbing the gray layers of cigar smoke with his passing. He caught the owner's eye.

The owner was hunched at the lookout table in the rear of the room, where the cash was. He looked down at Sam and saw the plea in those liquid eyes, saw the querulousness in the smooth-shaven face. A nice little guy, Sam. Most people liked him. Wife and two kids. Right now, he was dousing lamps, wanting to go home.

The owner's name was O'Brien. He held his cigar stub over a cuspidor and took aim. He let the stub drop. "Soon's you clean up, you can go home."

The buckboards and surreys moved away from the front lights and were gone. O'Brien was about to climb down from the lookout table and take off the store-bought Spanish regalia he affected for the trade, when he heard fast hooves.

Sam, down on the floor, stiffened and tipped his ear that way, rag in one hand, an empty bottle in the other. Sometimes he took the square empties home, so his wife could plant cornflowers in them and place them on the windowsills.

O'Brien was grunting, "What the hell?"

HALF a dozen horses thudded to a skidding stop and men swung down and wheeled and came at the doors. Sam calmly blew out the last lamp but one and braced himself. He saw leather thighs pumping up and plunging down; he saw shrouded faces lowered in front of raised shoulders. He saw them crowd through the doors with guns waving. The fattest one was threatening O'Brien. "Don't move! Hand down the cash!"

In a last thought before he acted, Sam demanded of himself why his friend McGunn hadn't warned him of this. But maybe McGunn never had the chance. The men were stepping past the tables. One waved a .44's barrel at Sam. "Lie down, greaser."

And Spanish Sam acted. He did it with both hands. He flipped the rag over the chimney of the one lighted lamp and he pitched the square bottle directly at the fattest man. Just before the lamp crashed out in a dying flap of flame he saw the bottle arc into that broad forehead and bounce off.

Blue-and-orange muzzle stabs chewed at the sudden darkness and glass broke somewhere and a man yelled wildly and sprawled to his knees, tripped by the half-conscious form of Rossiter.

Sam swung mightily at an advancing figure—one about his own size—and his small fist connected with hair and the figure jerked sideways and grabbed at a gaming table and slid down part way to the floor. Sam turned and sprinted to the short ladder leading up to the lookout table and felt for O'Brien.

A bottle neck cracked smartly and there was the urgent sucking sound of a man having a fast drink.

Tennant's crane-blackness rose like a wraith. "Start a lamp, someone." His voice sounded muffled in the neckerchief.

O'Brien dropped down, cash bag under one arm. "Thanks, Sam. Come on with me."

They groped past the bar, felt their way hurriedly along its length and came to the side-door. O'Brien opened it.

A muffled voice demanded a match. Then—"To hell with this thing!" And the voice rang clear. "I got a lamp!"

O'Brien clutched Sam's thin arm. "You stick with me, hear? We'll hide out in that arroyo 'til the patrol gets here."

"Hide out?"

Lamps blown from the front of the house and Sam saw faces. Five of them. Then a sixth rose painfully from between two tables—a hand touched for the bottle-wound.

"Yuh—they'll ride us down if we don't!" O'Brien yanked Sam out the side door and kicked it shut. He propelled him toward the arroyo with nervous nudges. He still had the cash bag . . .

Rossiter took his hand from the sliced skin of his forehead and tugged down his neckerchief, gasping harshly. "Damn greaser!"

Tennant held a cigarette to the lamp chimney and made smoke. His bony hands were shaking. "Fizzled fine, didn't we?"

"It was the little fella—the handyman." Dorf tapped the knuckle-burn on his hair line. "Knocked me to my knees, the little—"

"Easy." Rossiter seized the broken bottle from Dorf. He drank. He eyed the other three, huddled by the opened doors. "You were a lot of help!"

For a minute nobody spoke.

"We were behind you, Ros'." The voice was a thin whine.

"Yeah—an' so was the floor." Rossiter drank again, and belched. He patted his belly. "They got clean away. Out the back. I seen O'Brien with the cash." He passed the almost empty bottle to Dorf, who drank and handed it to Tennant. Tennant emptied it.

Tennant shuddered to the bite of the whiskey. "No use goin' after 'em. They

probably got clean off to the bridge by this time . . . Ros'—you think we was recognized?"

"O'Brien never saw us, but that greaser Sam might've . . . Let's pay call his way."

They trailed up the night toward the little 'dobe, anger-packed eyes picking out the single rectangle of orange light. "We'll git a drink there, anyway," Dorf was promising.

"Mebbe a kiss too—huh, Tennant?" Rossiter sneered.

"Careful—he's got friends in town."

Rossiter saw two female figures step into the moonlight. "No greaser has friends." He pulled down to a trot. "Look yonder, you think I'm wrong."

The surreys and buckboards were bouncing north at the gallop, whips slashing. They were silhouetted against the distant glow of La Linea's lights once; then lurched around a turn in the trail and out of sight.

"Gun-fire scares tourists, reckon . . . Evenin', miss."

Rossiter and Tennant swung down and dragged reins groundward and touched their hat brims.

Dorf watched the recalcitrant three canter up the night toward the river without regrets. He dropped down and approached Maria.

He reached out unsteadily for her. Her mother shrieked and waddled between them. Rossiter and Tennant snapped out their guns, flipped them butts-first and used the butts. They stepped over the two women toward the 'dobe, wanting to complete their revenge against the man who had taken away their evening's fun.

Rossiter had one foot in the entrance when he stopped. "Reckon we better use a torch, Tennant." He went on in. "Teach a Mexkin man to get in my way."

JUDGE SLAVINS studied the bench warrants made out to John Doe. He counted them, one to six, then thrust them across his desk to Bimbo Jennings, the town marshal. The morning heat was heavy on the tar roof, and Judge Slavins picked up a reed fan and swung it idly back and forth.

Through the window of his office on the second floor over the jail he could see the twice-weekly train tossing smoke from its bell funnel as it departed La Linea for

eastern regions. The Judge thought there was a faintly apologetic air to that train.

"You sure there were six even, Jennings?" Slavins had a brittle, nasal voice—spang-sharp, like the hammer-smack of a Spencer. He was a brittle man, lean and gray. He did not like Bimbo Jennings. Nobody did.

The town marshal sucked his empty gums and nodded until his jowls quivered. He ran plump thumbs up and down his suspenders and blinked egg-moist eyes. "That's what O'Brien says. I was down there."

Bimbo counted the warrants, as if they were money. It came to him that they might become money, if a reward was posted; and it came to him from the other direction that he could never serve these warrants. The two thoughts collided, and he knew regret.

The Judge waited until the eastbound train was out of sight. "Well, they had their violence, but they won't be back." He slapped at a fly and missed. "O'Brien doesn't know who did it?"

"If he does," Bimbo sniggered—"he ain't sayin'." Bimbo liked to impute to others the cringing characteristics of himself. "Sam ain't been seen."

"Maybe they got Sam, too."

Bimbo swung his jowls. "O'Brien says Sam left the arroyo when the 'dobe started to burn. He ain't seen him since." Bimbo pocketed the warrants distastefully. He had no wish to mix into this thing.

Judge Slavins slapped at the fly and got it. "Then there were no witnesses?"

"The lights like I said, Y'onner, was put out. By Sam." Bimbo Jennings had a thought, it brightened his eyes. "Mebbe Sam was an—an—accomplice, they call it."

Judge Slavins looked as if someone had just placed a caterpillar between his lips. He made a spitting sound. "An accomplice? So he saves the cash and helps O'Brien guard it afterward? An accomplice—so he hides out while his family . . ." The Judge bit it off. He didn't want to think of Spanish Sam's family. Revulsion welled up in him. He gripped the head of the cane that lay on his desk, as if he wanted to swing it.

The Judge put the cane down, carefully. He shook out the folds of his linen coat. "You find Sam. Maybe he'll tell us who it was."

"He's gone, Y'onner! He wouldn't talk anyway—they'd rub him out afore he could say *Sí, sí, señor*." Bimbo sniggered again.

"He mus' know that." Bimbo raised his hat to his head.

But Judge Slavins wasn't quite finished. "You get this cleared up, Jennings. It happened in International Territory, so it's our affair as well as Mexico's."

"I'll try, Y'onner." Bimbo made a helpless hand-gesture.

"Hell!" Slavins felt nauseated. "Murder's bad enough, and burning them first—" Yellow splinters came from his eyes as he thought of that savage night.

Bimbo almost had his hat on. "Mebbe, Y'onner, it was other Mexes done it."

Slavins wished that he could crush this creature as simply as he had the fly. "They're notable for clannishness—especially in border towns." The Judge's words came like a fusillade of Spencer shots. "Now get this cleared up or I'll send for Frank Wills!"

Bimbo put on his hat. "I don' need no federal marshal to do my work."

"Prove that to me." Slavins watched Bimbo leave. Slavins felt sick again, he needed to vomit and couldn't. He crushed another fly.

Bimbo Jennings lumbered through the

silent streets of La Linea like a sore-footed bear. He passed Perico's Frijoles and ignored Perico's half-scared greeting. He turned into The Old West where tourists could buy cheap souvenirs for high prices and could drink raw liquor for ripe money. But they couldn't go upstairs.

They couldn't enter the back room, either. Few persons could. Bimbo went all the way to it, knocked, and waited.

Grumbles McGunn, sweeping up, raised his old head and fixed alert eyes on Bimbo's wide back. Grumbles breathed, "You gonna 'rrest me for it?" It was a joke to Grumbles.

But it was not a joke to Bimbo. He wrenched his face around. "Shut up an' clean cuspee-dors!" Bimbo seldom arrested anybody.

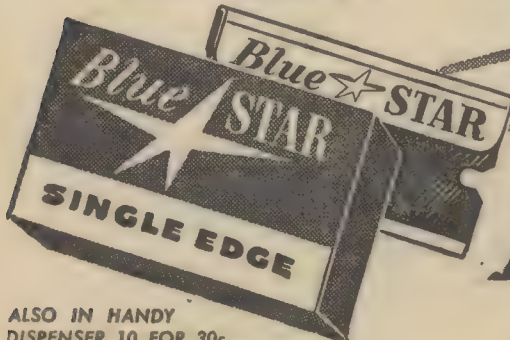
A voice called softly, "Come on in."

It was cool in there, green curtains kept the nooning sunlight out. And it was clean. Rory Galoon saw to that. Rory had played the rails in his better days—played poker with fellow train passengers. He always had won the last pot before reaching his station. It was his business.

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So was The Old West. He played several games in many ways. "Sit down, Bimbo." Rory's voice, like his hands, was soft. His silver-patch hair and pressed clothing made a friendly picture.

Bimbo focussed through the semi-darkness of the back room and found Rossiter, Tennant, and Dorf at another table. Three men Bimbo vaguely recognized were sitting in the other corner.

Rory Galoon asked, politely, "Looking for anyone in particular?"

"Me? No, gosh, no." Bimbo fanned his fingers helplessly. He shook his cheeks into a sick grin. "The Judge, though—" he allowed a raucous lip-flap to break from Dorf's face—"is kinda hot about this."

The lip-flap ripped again. "Where'll he get a jury?"

"Shut up, Dorf." Rossiter was in a vile mood. He was tender in the head from too much tiswin and his mouth tasted brown. "He's got to get us before he can get a jury—an' he won't get us." Rossiter touched the lump on his forehead where the square bottle had struck him the night before.

Bimbo flicked his moist eyes from one to the other, all around the room. They seemed to be mocking him. "Jus' thought I'd tell you you better leave for awhile." He didn't mention Frank Wills, it might make these men think that Bimbo was afraid of Wills. Which was true.

One of the three men in the far corner whimpered, "We wasn't in it. We run off early."

"Yellow?" Rossiter glared that way. Then he told Bimbo, "We'll burnout every greaser shack in Mexico if we got to!" There wasn't much strength in the bluster; even to Bimbo, the man sounded nervous. "Won't we?"

Dorf and Tennant heartily agreed.

Beyond the door, Grumbles McGunn muttered to himself, "Findin' strength in each other."

He went on with his sweeping.

Rory Galoon asked, "That all, Bimbo? Take a drink on your way out, if you want to." Rory Galoon was clean, like the place he ran. He lived by doing small favors and extracting big ones in return. You could see him in almost any border town.

Bimbo snapped his suspenders and the badge on the left suspender made a *thung*

as it hit his chest. He opened the door and went out, and before he closed the door Rory called, "Grumbles—don't forget to get more tiswin from Jaime!"

Grumbles craned his old neck up. "Don't worry, I won't."

SPANISH SAM mingled deep in the twilight crowds that flowed lazily over the River Street Bridge from the Mex side to the States side of La Linea. One hand was clutching the melted crucifix that he carried in a side pocket. It was all that he had recovered from the charred ruins of his home. Even the cornflower bottles had burst and oozed to shapelessness.

He passed Jaime's tiswin shop without looking in. His other hand was holding the pocketed one-shot dueling derringer that O'Brien had lent him.

The snakeskin riata around his waist under his singlet was cool on his warm flesh. The only other weapon he carried, in addition to the derringer and the riata, was a knife. A bullet, a riata, and a blade. He would have to use them judiciously; they were all he had to work with.

The muddy drift of the river was under his sandalled feet and he paused a moment to peer down at the current. Sometimes flowers swept past, and it was soothing to the soul to speculate upon what hand would pick them from the water, and why.

An old man with a white thatch tottered slowly down from the States end of the ramp, carrying an empty jar. He coughed as he approached Sam, and as he passed, jar swinging, his words were a triple out-breathing that came all at once—"Dorf Tennant Rossiter." And Grumbles McGunn tottered on down into the Mex side of town, headed for Jaime's and more tiswin.

Spanish Sam moved with the crowd into River Street, a small brown man indistinct from a hundred others. He decided on Rossiter first, because Rossiter had been more drunk than the rest, and therefore probably the instigator of what had happened. Sam wasn't surprised. He thought he'd recognized the big man when O'Brien had pulled him through the side door.

Sam hummed softly to himself as he walked. He crossed River Street at a point not quite opposite The Old West, reached the planking and cut back toward the place. It was full evening now, and he could see

before he could be seen. He ducked into an alley entrance between the blocks separating The Old West from Perico's Frijoles; he crept down the purple tunnel, hearing the street sounds fade behind him. He came to a drain pipe at the rear of The Old West and stared upward. Hard-angled against a spatter of stars was the rear balcony of the second floor, where Senor Galoon occasionally let rooms.

Spanish Sam reached the balcony rail with the agility of a cat and whipped a leg over it. He stood flat against the wall, listening. Then he opened the door and went into the corridor. A lone ceiling lamp was a misty blob of light far down, where the stairs led below to the front of the place.

Sam worked slowly, with none of the outward haste which implies guilty movements. And finally he found Rossiter's room, the last one on the right, the last one Sam examined. He knew this was Rossiter's room because the stained clothes were of the man's size and because they smelled strongly of charred wood. Rossiter, at least, had thought to change afterward. Sam doubted if Tenant or Dorf had.

He waited for what seemed all night. He waited while the voices grated up from below, while poker chips tinkled and glasses tinkled together. He waited, hearing his friend Grumbles McGunn pushing the sale of tiswin. Corn liquor and lemon juice, Grumbles always preached. Good for the feet, or something.

And then Rossiter came. Sam forced himself against the board wall behind the door, knife out, knuckles tight. Rossiter staggered uncertainly up the corridor, clutching at door jambs. He kicked open his own door and stumbled in, stinking of tiswin and stale tobacco and ripe sweat.

Spanish Sam's breath hissed out through his teeth with the effort of plunging the blade through that sack-soft body . . .

JUDGE SLAVINS stalked stiffly around his desk, anger and contempt lashing his voice to the brittle overtones. "Have you talked to his friends? Who saw him last?"

Bimbo Jennings studied the floor. He pulled a greasy sleeve across his damp forehead. "He didn't have any friends, Y'onner. An' no one knows who seen him last."

The Judge made a choking noise. He had to swallow, and it was dry. "Does this have anything to do with Sam? With what happened to his family? What do you say, Bimbo?"

Bimbo shrugged heavily. "Mebbe, Y'onner, this was—suicide."

Slavins spit and missed the cuspidor, a rare occurrence. "Nobody but Japanese people do that with a knife!" He drilled an eye into Bimbo. "What kind of knife was it?"

Bimbo Jennings shuddered. "Don' ask me, Y'onner. It was pinnin' him to the wall, an' I didn't tech it. That's—why, that's the coroner's business!" The thought was salvation to him; he had spent exactly fifteen seconds in that room above The Old West. Rossiter was more evil-looking dead than he ever had been alive. "Mr. Galoon—he sent Grumbles to the jail this mornin' for help, an' I went."

"Help!" The word was a snarl. Slavins stalked behind his desk and sat down, the strength seeping from him. He placed his candle-slim fingers together and stared across their tips.

"I telegraphed for Frank Wills an hour ago. He should be here before tonight." Slavins fixed his eyes on Bimbo's badge, as if he planned to eat it.

Bimbo kept passing his hat brim through damp palms, around and around and around. He didn't look up, he didn't dare. "I couldn't help it, Y'onner."

"Frank Wills'll help it." Judge Slavins smiled for the first time in two days. It was not a nice smile.

"The federal marshal?" Bimbo Jennings thought of the man as a hound dog. He could envisage him in the rig that he always rode, slapping reins and whistling. Wills was a man-hunter, to Bimbo's belief. An animal, really, but mounted on two legs. And Frank Wills had never fizzled a case, which was why he still was federal marshal after almost twenty years.

Bimbo Jennings ran a thumb up his left suspender and gripped his badge and hung onto it with all his might.

Slavins, seeing that, smiled again. This time it was an amused smile, very nice.

Bimbo's face was a bit green. He was still feeling the effects of the fifteen seconds he'd spent with Rossiter's body. He was very quiet.

CHAPTER TWO

Graves End

FRANK WILLS raised La Linea just before twilight, when the amber backwash of the dying sun still lay across green skies traced with crimson. He rode easily in his two-wheeled rig, reins loose, one boot resting on the chipped dashboard, whip idle. He had no idea why Judge Slavins had telegraphed him to come.

Wills had an old face with young eyes. His sagging brown moustaches, shot through with silver, caught the corners of his mouth like two hooks holding his thin lips in place. He was forty-two, and during his twenty years as a hunter of men he had come to understand that sometimes you can find yourself hunting the wrong man, although everyone will tell you that he's the right one. It is a knowledge that few come by, and it is always difficult to recognize. The worst juries, Wills knew, were street crowds. And the worst judges were panic.

He chucked to his horse and crossed one boot over the other on the dash. Lights were opening saffron eyes in La Linea and soon it would be dark. Wills wanted to see Slavins tonight. He chucked to his horse again, and felt his top pockets for makings.

By the time his cigarette was going, Wills was asking a man where a stable might be.

GUBBINS' ALL-NIGHT STALLS & FEED
NEVER CLOSED—

the flaked lettering read.

Wills turned his rig in, and pointed for the two-story court house. Pretty good, he thought. Two stories high. La Linea must be progressin'.

The Judge rose, something he did for few men. "Hello, Frank." He was smiling.

"Hello, Judge." Wills glanced once at the perspiring lout in the corner. The defendant, he guessed. "Some of your tourists complainin' of the service?"

"No tourists left to complain. . . . Sit down. That's Jennings, the town marshal."

Bimbo stood up, nodding meekly. "Mighty pleased to make your 'cquaintance, mighty pleased to—"

Slavins coughed abruptly. "Four dead people, Frank." The Judge told him about it.

Wills' cigarette suddenly burnt his fingers and he dropped it and heeled it. He ripped off his hat and whacked a crossed boot and let the rowels tinkle to silence. He hung the hat on his spur. "First the Mex family, then this Rossiter?" He eyed Bimbo a moment, and lost interest. He'd seen them like this before—hanging onto their badges, playing everything all ways to win, not wanting trouble. "Well, well. This Mex family all buried?"

"O'Brien handled it." Slavins told him who O'Brien was.

Wills asked a few more questions. Then—"Rossiter buried yet?"

Bimbo couldn't stand his own silence any longer. "Nobody's teched him, seh. I seen to it."

"I'll be jumpered." Wills took his hat off the spur and put it on. "You check for soot or ashes on anyone's boots? You examine clothing?" They were mock queries. Wills was only thinking aloud.

"Too late now." Bimbo massaged his hat brim in his hands. "'Sides—who'd I look at first?" Bimbo sucked his gums. "What I'd do is put Rossiter's body in the Mex side of town as a warnin'. With a sign sayin' that if anythin' like this happens again—"

"What makes you so sure a Mex did it?" Wills was on his feet.

"Why—it was a knife job, an'—an'—" Bimbo spun his hat brim nervously.

Slavins said, "Frank, if you want any deputies, or anything—"

"I'd rather work alone, thanks." He stood up, one slumbrous eye on Bimbo. "He can take me to the unburied corpse, but mostly I'll work alone." It was always better, hunting men alone. For one thing, it was faster, there wasn't the inertia of a spreadout posse; for another thing, you didn't get a continuing babble of deputies' opinions, you arrived at your own facts and drew your own conclusions.

BIMBO led him up to Rossiter's room and then stood aside. Bimbo didn't want to enter that room again. Frank Wills went in and half-shut the door. He placed knuckles to hip beltings and sniffed a few times. Roseiter was pinned to the wall boards as neatly as you please. His lower jaw hung down and his eyes stared up. His thick shoulders sloped limply. Flies darted around his head.

Wills knelt and examined Rossiter's boots and lower breeches, but there was no soot or char. He rose and leaned close to the hilt that protruded from Rossiter's chest bone. It was the kind you'd see in any souvenir shop, any tourist trap. It was braided with tan leather, wrapped around a shiny metal frame.

Frank Wills bent his face to that open mouth and inhaled. "Tiswin," he murmured. "Drunk, probably." He left the room. "Show me the way downstairs, Jennings."

Rory Galoon nodded courteously. He waved a hand across the back room and said, "Mr. Tennant, there, and Mr. Dorf." The other three had gone. Bimbo guessed that they wouldn't be back, either.

Tennant and Dorf regarded Wills with pale, hostile eyes. Neither moved.

Wills asked, "Friend of yours?" And hooked a thumb upward.

"Kind of." Tennant elevated his gauntness from the chair and stood high above the table, arms at sides. "Who done that thing?"

"I don't know." Wills three-fingered a cigarette together. "Maybe the party who

did that work at the Mexican's place." He stuck the cigarette in his lips.

Tennant faced over to Dorf; little Dorf shifted to Galoon. Galoon looked away. Bimbo Jennings took off his hat.

Wills pulled a match up his thigh and lighted the cigarette. He had to suppress a smile, for these men were frightened men. He dropped the match and spouted blue smoke into the green coolness of the curtained room. They were frightened, but not by him. They were frightened by the hand that had smashed that knife into Rossiter's chest. Little patterns of possibility began to form in Wills' mind, like shadows being shifted by a rising sun.

Wills exhaled from the side of his mouth, not wanting to blow smoke into Rory Galoon's face. Galoon wouldn't be in this thing, Wills knew that. The Rory Galoons never are; they perch on the fringes of crime, never soiling their hands. They do business with the cat and with the mouse. So Wills asked Galoon, "What does Spanish Sam look like?"

Rory caressed his shaven chin with wand-white fingers. "Small, as I recall. About fifty,



oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"HE'S GOT LADDIE BOY in check all right, but not Dry Scalp. My, what unkempt hair! Looks like a mane . . . and I'll bet it's as hard to comb. Loose dandruff, too. He needs 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"

*Hair looks better...
scalp feels better...
when you check Dry Scalp*

IT'S GREAT! Try it! See what a big difference 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic makes in the good looks of your hair. Just a few drops daily check loose dandruff and those other annoying signs of Dry Scalp . . . spruce up your hair quickly and effectively. Contains no alcohol or other drying ingredients.

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not over that. No hair on his face. Steady."
"Steady?"

Rory lowered his fingers. "A good worker, a family man." He almost failed to finish that sentence. But he recovered, for emotion had tripped his voice, not reason, and emotion had no place in business. Galoon was a business man. "Talk to O'Brien. He hired him." Galoon inspected his curled fingertips. "Just another Mexican."

"Maybe I won't have to." Wills said to Bimbo, "Judge Slavins is pretty good at straining information and passing the dregs along." He inhaled slowly and exhaled slowly and held the cigarette over a cuspidor and released it. "Jennings, deputize who you need and block every road and bridge. You know the town, you'll know how many men to get."

Bimbo goosed his suspenders a few times, nodding. "No reward?" It was a favorite theme of his, even if he couldn't pick it up. He was thinking of a split later, after the hunted men had been taken and jailed.

Casually, Wills asked, "A reward for who, Jennings?"

Bimbo clapped on his hat, open-faced. Tennant and Dorf were daring him with set faces to offer a deduction. He didn't; he turned and shoved himself through the door into the front room. "I'll get them depities."

Wills put the middle finger of his left hand to his forehead and pushed his hat back an inch. Sweat that had been warm under the band became cool in the air. "Mind if I talk to your sweeper, yonder?"

"Go right ahead." Galoon's interest in Spanish Sam was paling rapidly.

Grumbles McGunn leaned on his broom and pouched his old face at this man Wills. He had heard of this hunter, and he had liked what he heard. In McGunn's world—a world shrunken down to the focus of his few remaining years—any man who molded his own reputation with his own mind and muscles and then made people salute the creation, was a man to be respected.

"Have a drink with me, Mr. McGunn?"

Grumbles ordered double-rye. It wasn't often that a government hunter asked him to drink. "What was Rossiter like?" he repeated. "A saddle tramp, if you want the truth of't. Waitin' for a drive to make up." Grumbles drank half his drink, saving the rest. Savoring it. "Just fillin' space for

awhile." Grumbles pursed his wrinkled lips at the half-emptied glass. "Not good, not bad."

"Any enemies?"

Grumbles drank. "Not that I know of." He was gentle with the glass on the bar. "No friends, either."

"You know Sam, don't you? Spanish Sam?" It was a guess, but hunters frequently must guess. It was based on the assumption that a gringo sweeper on this side of The Line would be likely to know a Mex sweeper on the other side of The Line.

"I know lots folks, Mr. Wills. Sam was a good Mexkin. Savin' money to send his girl down to school in—"

"Was a good Mexican?" Wills held his glass halfway to his mouth in arched shoulder tension.

Grumbles shrugged it off. He was tiring now, he was becoming slightly confused. What had Sam once told him? 'Don't drown in shallow water'. An old Spanish proverb.

Wills drank. "All right, Mr. McGunn. You don't want to know, do you?"

Nobody had called Grumbles. "Mr. McGunn" in a long, long time. "It ain't that, Mr. Wills, it's jus' that—I don't know." Grumbles had a code, in that shrivelled world of his, and he would adhere to it. He'd lifted a stage once, years back in time, and taken a hideful of buckshot because somebody had talked to the law. "Rossiter climbed to bed drunk, that's all I know." Talk to yourself, talk to your friends, but never talk to the law.

Frank Wills stood a moment in the evening light, raising himself up on his toes, lowering himself to his heels. It was an exercise he performed whenever he could, to keep his legs limber. He rode a rig so much that he had to keep the leg muscles unknotted somehow. He elevated his analysis to the two crimes—one a crime of fury, the other a crime of deliberation. He wanted to satisfy himself as to which, in his considered opinion, was the worst. For he no longer had doubt that one led to the other, that each had been committed by a different man or men.

"Creepin' up on a man that way an' stickin' him," Tennant, emerging from the back room, muttered.

"In the dark, too," Dorf said, following Tennant into the brighter light of the front room.

And in that instant Frank Wills made his personal decision as to which was the worst crime.

He dug in a pocket and drew out a silver dollar and handed it to McGunn.

"Buy a drink, sometime."

So, thought Frank Wills, *I've got a hot stone in each hand.*

Bimbo Jennings side-stepped through the latticed doors and touched his hat and almost took it off. "I got me some deppities, Mr. Wills. I'll eat now, then get some more."

"Oh—take your time, take your time."

Bimbo was watching Tennant and Dorf. They ignored him. Bimbo took a mighty breath and said, "What I'd do—like I tol' you an' Judge, seh—what I'd do is haul Rossiter jus' like he is down to Mex town an' leave it there with a note of warnin' sayin'—"

"Get it and take it out to the hill and bury it." Wills wanted to go to Perico's Frijoles for a chat with Perico. He'd had enough of The Old West, for the moment.

"Seh?" Bimbo's grimy thumbs were holding his suspenders out from his shirt.

"I said—take Rossiter out to the hill and plant him!"

Bimbo's face fell open with revulsion. "Tech that?"

Calmly, Frank Wills told him, "Sometimes, I get mad. And then I begin to sweat, and when I do, I itch." He reached straight out and snagged into those extended suspenders. "So I have to move to relieve it—like this!" And he pulled forward with a piston-jerk and swung Bimbo around and released his grip and grabbed the criss-crossed back suspenders and hauled back while with one boot he shoved forward those massive pants. He let go the criss-cross and there was a sharp swack and Bimbo staggered against the door leading upstairs.

Wills went out in a racketing wash of harsh laughter.

IN A lace-curtained room above Perico's Frijoles, Spanish Sam crouched with chin to window ledge and got a view of the dimly-lit street below.

There was a muted tension in the town, and Sam, from the upper window overlooking River Street, could sense it better than could the few people who walked the plankings. They walked fast, not strolling; they hurried to complete their errands.

Sam had seen Bimbo Jennings and one of his deputies carry a man-long tarpaulin past toward the hill. The tarp had been trickling sawdust, which was how the gringos buried their dead.

He tongue-swiped his parched lips.

The sight of the body had not uncorked any introspection in him, for he was compelling himself not to think of the past but the future. The past was a numbness in his mind anyway, a numbness accentuated by the faint scent of burnt wood and the sweet-rotten aroma of partly-cooked flesh. His flesh, in a way. When he had first thought of it like that, he'd compelled himself not to think of it at all. There was work to do, and that work lay in the future. Already the future was coming to him, slipping through his fingers, through his soul.

He clutched the melted crucifix in one hot hand.

The future was being delineated, in a way, by the men who ambled out to the bridges and east and west along River Street, carrying shot-guns. Road guards, Sam knew. Weapon blocks posted by Jennings but thought of, doubtlessly, by that Frank Wills. Panchito, the Mexicans called him. Little Frank. Spanish Sam had never thought that he'd have Little Frank on his trail.

It was grimly amusing to Sam that Frank Wills was having both cause and effect to solve; it was not amusing at all, to Sam, that in creating the effect, he had turned the search on himself.

He shrugged limply. That was too bad. Wills would have some more effect to worry about soon.

But how?

In his other hand he held the derringer. It had been good of O'Brien to lend it to him; he must return it to his boss someday, somehow.

A single-shot dueling pistol, a relic that O'Brien might have sold to a turista. Well, O'Brien hadn't, and maybe Sam's crucifix had in some ethereal way compelled him not to. You never could tell, there was a lot of strength in a crucifix. More than in any mortal.

More, assuredly, than in Tennant or Dorf. They were standing in front of The Old West, smiling at something. They hadn't left the place since they'd returned from the Territory two nights before.

Tennant, said Spanish Sam to his soul.

But how?

He couldn't risk that single shot now, and have the marshals come down on him before he could get at Dorf. There must be some other way.

It occurred to Sam that neither Tennant nor Dorf had offered to be deputized because they hadn't wanted to expose themselves to a man who knew who they were and who struck suddenly, finally, in the dark. It was lonely on some of those roads, and the bridges were lampless after midnight, when the Mexicans had to be back on their side of The Line. The thought made little Sam feel better. They were afraid of him. No one had ever been afraid of him before, to his knowledge.

He wondered if Frank Wills was afraid of him, and decided not. Not Panchito, that was going too far. It was enough that Tennant and Dorf had the fear. Fear is the father of uncertainty, and when a man is uncertain he is ripe for the picking.

Sam's diaphragm stretched queerly and his mouth dried out. Frank Wills was marching slowly toward Perico's from The Old West, coat swinging, hat back, hands to belt-ings.

Sangre de Cristo! I must hide someplace else, I cannot endanger poor Perico longer!

But where?

He was dizzy with brain-speed, that hurtling rush of mental reflexes that results from sudden fear. It did not occur to him then that he had fear, and that is one of the blessings of sudden brain-speed. It obliterates animal emotion and hones the reasoning processes.

And it came to him with wondersome clarity. The hill, of course! Where else to go, when you must leave the land of the living for awhile? Where else to hide, when the living search only for the living? A cemetery is for the dead. Very well, Spanish Sam would be dead for awhile.

But how can I get to the hill tonight? There will be road blocks and they will— Sam released a stored-up breath at the image of what they would do to him.

Frank Wills was halfway to Perico's Frijoles, coming without haste.

The voice of Perico's wife came from the kitchen below, scolding one of her children in the ratcheting gabble of the hemispheric dialect.

Gracias a Dios!

And Sam flung himself from the window and crawled to the door, still not wishing to risk exposing himself to someone who might be watching from across River Street. He rapped smartly on the warped panelling.

He waited, heart slugging his ribs, tongue swishing along the backs of his teeth.

"Si?" One of Perico's boys, detailed as rear lookout.

"Panchito comes now. I must get out. Look—Panchito? Jorge? Vicente?—Vicente, so?—Get me some clothes from one of the girls, one of the older ones. A veil, too, from your mother. And some flowers. You hear that?"

Vicente dutifully but incredulously repeated it.

Sam's tongue was sticking to his teeth and he had to tick it free. It stung for a moment. He swallowed sandily. "Vicente—from one of the girls of my size, hear? Josefina, say. Quick!"

He thrust from his mind the laughing image of his Maria, who had been about his size. There was work to be done. The future was slipping past him already.

He hugged the panelling, listened for Vicente's returning footsteps.

FRANK WILLS paused, outside of Perico's Frijoles, and as a matter of routine swept his eyes over the place. Two-storied and with a bar in front, very un-Mexican. That would be for tourists, though. Beyond the bar were tables; and beyond them a latticed door leading to the kitchen. The family would sleep upstairs, Wills judged. Perico, having an established business on this side, would be permitted to remain and wouldn't have to cross to the Mex side at midnight.

Very odd law, thought Frank Wills.

But he was interested in men, not laws. Right now, he was interested in Perico. The man bowed by pulling his middle backward and trying to bend over it. He was too fat to nod from the waist without moving his legs.

He rose, a smile frosting his lower face. He wore moustaches, and they were scented.

A woman's voice gabbled and quacked from the kitchen and a boy burst out and ran upstairs with a bundle under his arm.

Wills nodded, and identified himself. "You speak English okay, don't you? I'd like to ask a few questions."

Perico was perspiring. It clung to his face and caught the lamplight and reflected it like a sheet of corrugated tin. He was breathing hard. His restless eyes rested everywhere but on Wills.

Wills asked a few questions, idly, scarcely hearing the fumbled answers. He was looking all around. He leveled his eyes at Perico. "Relax, don't act so scared."

Frying olive oil stained the humid air, and Wills inhaled sharply. "Might eat here."

"Please, senor—thees rest'rahnt—tonight is no good—" Perico's hands were flapping and he started to waddle in small circles, like an overfed goose.

"Mind if I poke through the place?" Wills was beginning to enjoy this. Not that he enjoyed human suffering or embarrassment, but because he had guessed that every Mexican in La Linea would know pretty well where Spanish Sam was, and would carry the knowledge badly.

Perico stopped waddling and held his hands out and up. "Please, senor, tonight there is sickness, we had a funeral, thees fam'ly ees in sorrow, we—"

A tiny footfall sounded in the stair well and a small figure in black edged slowly past the tables. It was the veiled figure of an old woman, cringing with sorrow. One black glove fisted mildewed flowers tenaciously.

The figure passed Perico and Wills with painful slowness and hesitated at the doors. Then it went out, and became purple in the blue street shadows.

"You see, *senor*?" Perico's hands were wide-flung, triumphantly. He didn't know how it had happened, but it had, and he was reminded to lower himself to his knees and supplicate the Virgin and offer humble thanks. *The good Lord*, thought Perico gratefully, *won't pick on some Mexicans any more than will a buzzard.*

"Well, I'll poke through the place anyway. At least I won't disturb your grandmother."

"No, no, senor, that's right, you don' dees-turb grandmother." And Perico giggled, flute-high; then he tittered inanely and held his belly and rolled his eyes. At his next Mass, he promised, he would offer a week's income to the Altar and light seventeen candles.

Wills came back and sat down. "Got any supper?"

"But of course!" Perico swayed toward the kitchen. "Mama! Mama!"

Frank Wills nibbled a toothpick, not feeling it. He would eat, and then he would make a routine check with the Mexican patrol, and then he would drop over to the court house and maybe find Slavins. Puzzlement was beginning to seep into Frank Wills, and perhaps the Judge would find a way to straighten him out. Wills was a man who could not abide puzzlement. It made him feel like only half a man.

TENNANT tugged one of the green curtains shut and swung sharp about to Dorf. They were alone.

"See anyone?"

In the stiff silence they barely heard the faint squeak of a rag in glassware as Grumbles McGunn cleaned up behind the bar. Rory Galoon had gone to a travelling show in the old wagon lot beyond town. He had said something about maybe booking an act for when the tourist train returned at the end of the week.

Tennant sat down. "No. A breeze, or a cat, I think."

"Window closed?" Dorf was whispering.

Tennant nodded. The fear was in him all the way now. It was crawling into his consciousness like a gray beast stalking for the kill. It made his eyes shine queerly, it took hold of his hands and made them tremble on the bottle. It almost spilled the drink he lifted to his cavernous face.

"How the hell long does this go on, Dorf?" His voice was a rough husk and that, too, was fear. It had settled into his throat and it was choking him.

Dorf wiped his narrow face and shook his head. His gun was on the table between him and the bottle, barrel pointing toward the curtained window. Nobody was going to creep up behind him in the dark. Nobody was going to catch him hands-empty.

"Tennant, let's get out."

The angular man frowned. He drew a knobby hand the length of his jaws. "Out of town?"

"All the way out. North." Dorf ran the black half-moon of a finger nail over the cross-hatching of his gun butt. "We could mebbe sign onto one of them northern brands. They'll be throwin' stock into the drives."

Tennant poured his sixth drink of the evening. They were big drinks, full to the tumbler rim. "S'pose we don't get out." He

turned the tumbler this way and that, not wanting to empty it yet. He was feeling drunk.

So was Dorf. "We could race for it, in the dark. Be clear away by sunup."

"Nuh-uh." Tennant raised the tumbler, eyed it, drank it down. "I got a better way. We'll hit back."

"Hit back?"

Tennant crouched closer across the table. "This isn't Sam, who got Rossiter. Sam took out—he had to! Don't you see?" Closer crouched big Tennant. "He seen us, I know he did. Will'll sweat it out of him—he'll have to. I know Wills, he's a damned bloodhound. He'll eat your soul!"

Tennant put his tumbler down, concentrating on what he wanted to say. "An' Sam knows that if he spills it to Wills who we are, we'll do for him jus' like we an' Rossiter done for his place." Tennant sat back, argument complete. Then he repeated, "Sam took out, so's Wills wouldn't sweat him."

Dorf took his finger nail from the beaded butt and rolled a cigarette and smoked it for three inhales and three exhales. "Some-thing, you said . . . About Sam's place—it kinda started me thinkin' different."

"About what?" Tennant was suspicious. They were in this thing together now.

"Remember what the fat boy said? Jennings? About how he'd tote Rossiter down to Mex town?" And Dorf crouched forward. "Well—why don't us do jus' that, an' leave Rossiter at Sam's old place?" Dorf turned his palms up. "Simple. An' whoever got Rossiter, who's ever plannin' now to get you an' me, Dorf—he'll think Rossiter did the hull damn thing by himself, that we know he did it by himself, an' that this's our way of tellin' him that."

Dorf leaned back, and holstered his gun. "Then he won't be botherin' us no more, an' we can sit it out in town here 'til the drive makes up." He dropped his cigarette and twisted it out with a heel.

The panic whimper of fear that had been disturbing the frayed curtain of Tennant's self-control now receded. Dorf's idea sounded good. It would be like hitting back, and it wouldn't make any difference to Rossiter.

"Dorf—le's you'n me have mebbe one more drink; then borry a shovel or some-thing an' get out to the hill." Tennant lifted the bottle.

Dorf held out his tumbler.

Grumbles McGunn watched them leave. He had expected them to buy him a drink, after all the carrying he'd done for them, but they didn't, and Grumbles stared angrily after them. Mr. Wills, now, he'd stood a double drink and then handed over a dollar for more. Grumbles would use that dollar for eating tobacco.

The hill, Grumbles had heard from the back room. Glassware clinking, after that; then laughter. McGunn bent his head and tried to draw from the tangles of his tired mind why two studs'd be going to the hill at night. They hadn't liked Rossiter that much.

Never talk to the law, Grumbles reminded himself.

But there's a time for everything, isn't there? Jus' 'cause forty years back someone squealed to a shotgun guard ain't no call for you to—He cut it off, shivering. He could see the hill, dark and silent in the moonlight, smelling of freshly-dug earth. Rossiter wouldn't have a headboard yet, but he had a grave.

Funny, Mr. Wills adding a solid dollar to that double drink. Almost like he expected something. The Judge did that sometimes, too. Smiled nicely, and offered a fifty-center or a dollar.

Grumbles sensed a struggle rising in him, the present versus the past, his conscience versus his code.

His friend Sam was in trouble, that was sure enough.

Grumbles bent to the struggle, hanging onto the bar in physical manifestation of mental turmoil. He could almost smell that newly-turned earth. . . .

Tennant drew the dampish cleanness of it into his nostrils and reined down hard. "It's over here, Dorf." Tennant had sobered somewhat during the ride out to the hill from town; even bantered a bit with the two road guards watching the approaches to the cemetery.

He wasn't awfully eager to do this thing, now. The stars seemed to be spying on him. The river, down to his left, was sounding an endless, warning rustle.

Dorf swung off his saddle and hit the ground with a thud. He wrested the spade from behind his cante and dragged reins over his horse's ears and let them loop downward. "Show me where he is."

Tennant dismounted very slowly, letting his right leg hang over his saddle for several

moments. His horse side-stepped in annoyance at too much weight in the left stirrup, and Tennant came all the way down. "Smells like it ain't covered up right." He stepped that way, half-crouched, his gauntness angling across the pin-bright stars.

"Come here with the spade, Dorf. You're closer to the ground than I am." Tennant stepped aside to let Dorf get to the fresh earth covering Rossiter's grave, and that's when the slat of the shot sent Dorf flat on his face in the dirt.

It sent Tennant flat on his face in the dirt too, with his right temple punched open and his left temple torn wide.

Dorf's muted bleat of fear was muffled in the spaded earth. Then he heard light footfalls thumping toward the river as fast as feet could go.

He sprang to his knees, wind-milled an arm toward the fear-swung reins of the nearest circling horse, jumped to his feet, found a stirrup and whipped a short thigh over the saddle and raked rowels.

CHAPTER THREE

Hangman's Sack

BIMBO JENNINGS came into Judge Slavins' lamp-brilliant office and took off his hat and sank his jowls apologetically. "He was eatin' at Perico's, Y'onner, an' it took a little time to find—"

Frank Wills shoved Bimbo out of the way. He stared wildly at Dorf and the man who was with him.

Slavins pinched his narrow nostrils together and picked up the reed fan and released his nostrils. "Tennant, Frank. They got him in the cemetery." The Judge gestured toward Dorf and the other man. "Tennant and Dorf, here, were making their own search. . . . That right, Dorf?" Mockery edged the question.

"Yessir, tha's right." Dorf was hatless and perspiring. "We was plannin' to track this party down, somehow. An' he plugged ol' Tennant for sure. Right through—" Dorf held a finger to his head—"here. Come in the right, tore out the left." He stopped, gasping. He beseeched Wills with a fear-stretched face that was pasty and pale under the black smear of a two-day beard.

Frank Wills knew no irritation, only something resembling relief. That puzzled

him more than he'd been puzzled earlier, though he could not confide this new puzzlement to the Judge. He was paid to bring in killers, and here was a killer who wantonly, insolently, had stabbed one man to death and blown another's head open. And the hunter knew relief.

"Who're you?" Wills stepped across to the man with Dorf.

Slavins said, "Road guard. He came in with Dorf and left his partner out there."

"You pass Dorf an' Tennant out to the hill?"

The man nodded. He was unaccustomed to being the center of attraction; he wished he was out of this thing. He ran a hardware store, not a marshal's posse. "'Bout half hour ago, I'd say."

Wills moved his head to one side without taking his eyes from the road guard. "Anyone else?" Wills became terrier-sly. He had a stake in the reply to that. "Think, man!"

Dorf blurted, "Yeah—think! 'Cause if you don't, they'll pin it on me." He had his gun out, thrust at Wills. "Here, feel it! It's cool, ain't been fired in—in. . . ." Dorf gulped a sob down. "You check Tennant's head? I couldn'a done—"

"Shut up." Wills didn't raise his voice. Dorf shut up, misery clouding his crowded features. He sat down, and presently he commenced combing his cropped hair with clawed fingers. In a crazy side-thought Dorf considered blaming Rossiter and Tennant for the whole thing, and clearing himself. The other three had run off at the last moment, and Dorf could get them to testify that he'd run with them. But suppose they wouldn't?

Dorf took his fingers from his hair, face crumpled in self-sorrow. He'd lost his hat during the sprint from the hill, and he felt naked. And it entered his head that he didn't have to clear himself with these men, but with whoever was lurking in the darkness with a knife and a gun. Bone-deep in him was the sure knowledge that he would never see that person. He trembled, and reached again for his hair.

Wills said, "What?"

The road guard's lips were moving. "Yeah—there was someone else come past. Little while afore Dorf here, an' Tennant come by."

Terrier-swift: "Who was it?"

The man squeezed a chin dimple shut.

"Why—some li'l ol' Mex lady, takin' flowers to a grave." He let go of his dimple. "They'll do that sometimes, an' 'specially after like what happened over The Line coupla days back. . . ." He let it trail off.

Boots scraped uncertainly on the stairs and Grumbles McGunn stood in the doorway, chest convulsing in and out, mouth open. He peered at each face separately, but he couldn't find his friend Spanish Sam. He relaxed against the door-post, utterly relieved. Sam was all right, then. Sam must be all right.

Slavins smiled gently. "Anything you want?"

Grumbles shook his head, came away from the door and slumped onto the caller's bench. Slavins let him stay there. Slavins fumbled in his weskit for a fifty-center to give the old man later.

Wills was saying, "Sam's family were buried on the Mex side. O'Brien did that for 'em." He asked the road guard, "Small lady, dressed in black? With a veil?"

"That's her."

"She come back from the hill?"

"No. But she could've gone 'round some other way." The man wasn't prepared to admit that he had let a murderer in disguise through his post.

But he could not know what Frank Wills wasn't prepared to admit, either. Wills popped fingers smartly. "Jennings—jackass out to the hill and scour that cemetery! I want every headboard looked behind. You, man—grab a lamp and get out to where Tennant is and start digging. We'll have to get him underground first, then call a coroner's jury. Isn't time to fiddle. Dorf—I'd advise you to get downstairs and stay in jail awhile. You'll be safer." Grumbles followed the three of them out, and Frank Wills was alone with Slavins.

The Judge put down his reed fan. "How do you know you're after the right man, Frank?"

"That depends on who you think's the wrong man, Judge."

Something like admiration crossed the Judge's eyes. "You're taking a chance."

"That's my business." Frank Wills had long since decided which crime held the highest jack-pot, and he was playing his cards as dealt.

"You don't like to see folks get kicked around, do you, Frank?"

"Maybe that's why I'm a man hunter, Judge."

Slavins' smile was small and quick. "Tell me something, Frank—why'd you send a blundering fool like Jennings out to search the hill?"

Wills hitched up his heavy beltings and started to leave. "Because I don't like to see the dead disturbed, Judge. . . . I'll be at Perico's for a few minutes."

He strode into the restaurant and forced anger into his voice. "You fat ox!" He made his fists quiver at his sides. "You don't have any grandmother! You let that man get away!" Wills glowered. "I ought to take you in as offerin' sanctuary to a felon an' obstructin' the due course of justice!"

Perico's hands fluttered together and he rolled his eyes upward and hoped that the Lord would hear his prayer and remain deaf to his lie. "My word, senor—my humble word—there was no man here, she was a lady who left." Perico shut his eyes tight, waiting for the cold clap of handcuffs.

That was the first time in Frank Wills' life that he ever let a man lie to him and get away with it.

He wheeled on one heel and strode out. He would go to the Mexican patrol office, now, and see if they'd crossed the trace of Spanish Sam to southward.

SAM finished burying the female clothes in the soft mud of the river bank. He couldn't go back to Perico's now, he'd be taken as easily as you can lift a puppy from a basket. He didn't know where to go.

He patted the mud a few times, smoothing out the viscous surface. He turned the warm derringer over once or twice.

He felt safe, down here by the river. He knew that Bimbo Jennings would reason that coming to the river was the most obvious thing to do, and that therefore Sam wouldn't do it. That's why he'd done it.

He plucked at the riata coiled around his body under the singlet. It was raw on his stomach and ribs. He wished he knew how he could use it, put it to work for him.

He heard the clumping of a horse coming nearer, then drumming away. The horse had been veering around like that for 'most an hour, its drunken plunges zig-zagging it all around the hill.

Sam smiled, secure for awhile in the plum-blue night. He fingered the melted crucifix

in his pocket. He withdrew it and put it to his lips and kissed it. It tasted of burnt metal, but he didn't care. He put it back in his pocket, throat unaccountably tight and salty.

Then he spotted a tiny blob of light up on the hill, up where he'd shot Tennant. That would be a recovery party, or a burial detail, Sam couldn't tell which. He hoped, for their sakes, that they'd dig a third grave now and save trouble later, for sooner or later Dorf would occupy it.

He wondered how he'd get Dorf. Providence had been with him, that last time. It had sent the infidel right to his hiding place among the headboards. He could have handled Dorf then and there—with the riata, perhaps—but he wanted the man to live with his conscience a little bit longer.

Unless, of course, Panchito Wills interfered: Panchito was a good man, known from the Trinity to the Brazos country and down to The Dalles and back. But that was just the reason that Sam preferred doing things this way, for if he had confessed the names of those three to Wills, there would have been testimony taken and witnesses brought in and a defense set up and a jury drawn. And gringo juries, on The Line, were notably peculiar about returning verdicts in favor of Mexicans. Sam knew that, and he knew that Frank Wills knew it.

Sam thought, *I got by Panchito once, back there in the restaurant, but I'll never get by him again.*

Or will I?

A sense of incompleteness was coming over him, as of something missing that should have been there. It was like coming suddenly upon a snake and being unable to back off, to break free, and not having the snake strike. That was the incompleteness of the thing.

It left Spanish Sam curiously easy of mind. That was bad, for one in his position; it left him with his guard down. So he projected his reasoning into the future. He projected it into Dorf, and tried to think of what he, Sam, would do if he was Dorf.

Leave town, that's what, Scamper. I'd go north, because straight north put more distance between me and Mexico. It is now two-to-one against me that I will live another day in La Linea, so I'll go north. Tonight.

Sam knew the empty country north of La

Linea. He'd cooked for an outfit there once, before Maria was born. It was broken country, ragged with rocks and ravines and scrub. Best of all, it had a winding valley running through it, and the valley was the quickest road out.

Spanish Sam got to his feet and crept west along the river bank, starting his long, wide circle around the hill and so northeast toward the shallow valley. He was afoot, and there weren't many hours of darkness remaining to him.

Frank Wills returned to the court house from his routine check with the Mexican patrol office. They had not crossed the trace of Spanish Sam; they were devastated, but they had not. A thousand apologies, but they would continue the search, of course. Tiswin, *señor?*

Dorf was quivering in a chair behind the cigar-stained desk in the jail's small lobby. The jailer was dozing in the other chair, feet on the desk. He started as Wills came in. He pulled his feet from the desk and lowered them and yawned.

"Judge's gone home, marshal. Says to call him should anything occur." He yawned again. His jaws made a creaking sound.

Wills stretched up on his toes and came down, stretched up and came down. He almost yawned himself.

Dorf dragged his bloodshot eyes from the cigar stains and stared at Wills. "What you doin' that for?" He left the chair. "Imitat-in' a hangin'? That fair?" The man was pleading, was sobbing. "You think it's funny?" He came around the desk, hands hung forward. They were grimy. His hair was mussy.

"Relax, mister." Wills yawned, helpless to prevent it. "Who's goin' to get hung?"

Dorf's eyes lighted up, strangely luminous. His fingers twitched in and out, in and out. Then he curled a fist and smacked it into his palm. "I'm trackin', Wills. Right now." The decision was too much for him, and he had to sit down. Rossiter or Tennant had made most of his decisions for him. He crossed a boot over one knee, playing nervously with the spur. It made little wheel noises when he spun the rowel. He half-closed his eyes as he plotted what he would do.

Frank Wills sat on the chain-bench reserved for visitors and groped in his shirt for makings. "I think it's your only chance,

Dorf." He three-fingered a cigarette together. "We can't protect you the rest of your life." Wills slid a match alight. "I'd get out tonight, 'f I were you. Some of those northern outfits throw their herds into the drives, don't they?" Wills started his cigarette and blew out the match and blew too hard and lost his cigarette. He stooped over, stooped low, and reached for it.

Dorf was nodding eagerly, still toying with his spur. "Sure they do!"

Wills saw what he knew he'd see—caked char crusting the high instep of Dorf's crossed boot.

He retrieved his cigarette and put it in his mouth. He was attempting to analyze another man's mind—Spanish Sam's. He was probing around to see how he, Frank Wills, would arrange one final effect of a single cause if he were Spanish Sam.

Wills concluded, as he smoked, that if he were Sam he would bet that Dorf would scurry out of town about now. Further, he would scurry north to create distance between himself and threat. So Sam, therefore, must get north in order to intercept this last of three, and create a final effect. It would be interesting to watch.

Wills was beginning to like this Spanish Sam, whoever he was.

Dorf uncocked his boot and stood up. He made an arm-move for something, and recalled that he'd lost his hat. He'd get him a new one, by heck, in the first town he came to. "Right now, Wills."

"Which way you goin'?" Wills spit out his cigarette and stamped on it with a sharp boot-crack, like he would have stamped on a tarantula.

"Straight through the valley, mister. Fastest way, an' I'm in a hurry." At the door he turned back. "Lemme know when you catch up with whoever's doin' this." A sick grin leapt up one side of his small face. "An' drop a daisy on Tennant's grave—will yuh?" He was gone down the steps to the tie-rail.

Wills yawned. "What's the name of that all-night stable? Gubbins?"

"Never closed," the jailer grunted. "You fixin' to see some of our moonlight, marshal?"

Wills got off the chain-bench, hearing Dorf gallop up the street. Damn fool, he'll dry the horse out, which'll make it simpler for Sam. "No—I kind of favor the dawn."

SPANISH SAM had to mold the form of his ambush to fit the shape of the terrain. He was lying on a flat thumb of rimrock, a dozen feet above the trail, waiting for Dorf. He would have preferred to secret himself in a cutbank, but there was none. There was only the wide, shallow valley with stands of rocks studding its sloping sides. And so where the trail northward dog-legged around the rimrock, Sam had taken position.

Years before, they'd anchored the chuck wagon over in that scatter of sun-burnt cottonwoods. Sam couldn't see them now, it wasn't quite daylight, although a grayness was running with the wind across the eastern skies.

He pulled the riata through his right fist, wary of kinks that might have resulted from its having been looped around his middle for so long. He knew that Dorf would come, he knew it, he knew it, he knew it. Hadn't the crucifix told him so?

The grayness in the east was distinct.

After this, Sam would give himself up to Panchito. He would walk back to La Linea and go to Frank Wills and say, *Here I am, I did these things, do what you wish. Dorf is hanging from a rock ten miles up the valley, and I hung him there.*

The coming sun was wounding the dawn, bleeding it pale crimson. The breeze was dying and soon it would be light. Sam heard fingertips drumming softly on wood. They were drumming from the south.

Sunrise was a crimson wash spreading the length of the skies. The cottonwoods faded from black to blue. They were becoming brown.

The hooves slowed to a steady chick-chuck . . . chick-chuck . . . chick-chuck.

Dorf, walking his horse. Alternately galloping and walking, he'd be, to save the animal for the long, trail miles ahead. There wasn't any water this side of Yuba Creek.

Dorf walked into the sunrise, bare head down, knees knocking lightly on worn saddle skirtings. His hands were crossed on his pommel, as if there wasn't any strength left in him. His horse's deep-globed eyes were nearer to the trail than they had any right to be.

Poor beast! Sam wriggled to the flinty ledge and eased his right hand back and shook out the noose. He secured the holding knot in his left fist, and clenched hard. He

thought, *All I need is some pigging string.*

Dorf's horse blew dryly through the rubber-velvet of its loose mouth.

Yuba Creek is not far, caballito—for you. Sam's riata snaked gracefully out and gracefully down and smacked neatly around Dorf's thin shoulders.

Sam was on his feet, straining with all his might. The horse lunged sideways and whirled and bucked once and broke into a heavy gallop past the rimrock, saddle empty. Sam almost lost footing, his heels grated along the rock's surface, then caught. He was using his arms and legs and back muscles, see-sawing left and right to relieve the deadening weight that he could not see. Then he was back-stepping, hauling straight, not see-sawing. He felt the riata vibrate, as a fishing-line jerks to the tugs of a hooked fish. That would be Dorf's weakening fingers snapping futilely at the thing that was lifting him into unconsciousness, breaking off his air, swelling his face.

When Spanish Sam saw the tousled hair of that purple-skinned head rise even with the ledge, he pegged the holding knot into a rock crevice and sat down. He was shivering.

The riata quivered once as Dorf's feet kicked in reflex to the final impulses of life.

Sam crossed his arms over his drawn-up knees and put his face to his wrists and began to sob. The crucifix, as he leaned double, was hard and reassuring against his body, and presently he got it out and held it close to his damp eyes.

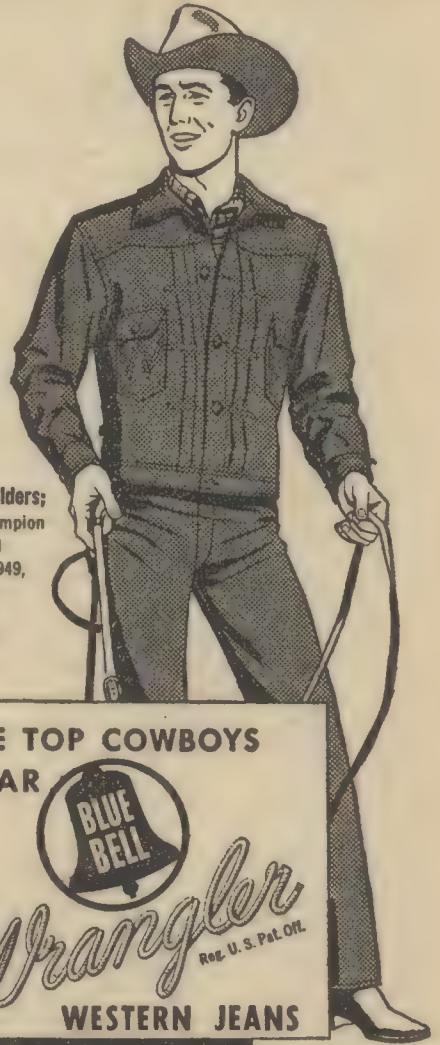
"You should have done better than that."

Sam spun off his haunches and flung himself around and almost dropped the crucifix.

Frank Wills was squatting next to an age-seamy shoulder of sandstone, not six feet from the crevice holding the riata's knot. He was smoking contentedly. "You should have done it quicker." Blue smoke sifted from his nostrils and drifted across the sunlight. "When you want to hang a man like that, always use your fast tug first. That'll maybe bust his neck and save you a lot of pullin'."

A wintry look crossed Sam's face. Pan-chito, then, had seen the whole thing. Sam saw the rig, in that instant. It was down the trail, side-angled into a dent in the slope. The horse was standing on three legs, idly twitching its tail.

Sam took a deep, lung-cracking breath.



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Frank Wills stood up and spit out his cigarette and stepped on it. Sam picked at his pockets until he found the cold derringer. He thrust it at Wills butt-first, the way the gringos did.

Wills accepted it, snapped it open, squinted through its lone barrel, and closed it. "All over, now, eh Sam?" He pocketed the derringer. "Three of three, all even." He stared sadly at those rock-ripped feet and mud-crusted legs and torn singlet. He stared at those things, but there was no pity in his eyes. He couldn't find any pity for this little man, only respect. Respect, and a curious awe.

Sam put the crucifix back in his singlet. "I am ready to go now. You are the man hunter, and you have caught me."

Wills' smile was slow, like his words. "You're not so bad at that kind of thing yourself." He stepped the length of the taut riata and peered down at Dorf. He faced around to Spanish Sam.

"Give me some help, will you? I brought along a spade that Jennings found on the hill. We'll bury this man here, under the rocks so the coyotes won't get him. Then we'll ride back together."

"Senor?" Sam's ears were buzzing, his tongue felt thick.

Wills repeated it, speaking carefully. "We'll return to La Linea together, but you'll be under canvas, sort of. In a sack I usually carry. I'll tell you about it during the ride. . . . Come on, lend a hand here."

JUDGE SLAVINS was leaning on his cane on the plankwalk outside the court house, looking Wills over minutely, as if he had never seen him before. Wills was pretending great anger and excitement. "Here's Dorf—" he elbowed the sack—"and your man Sam got clean away up toward Yuba!"

Wills reached out and cracked his fingers at the town marshal. "Get to hell up the valley, man! Take your deputies with you!" He glared frostily. "I'll take Dorf out to the hill and dig him in." To Slavins—"You can call a coroner's jury for all three, now." Wills faced sharp around to Bimbo Jennings, arced back an arm and back-handed the man's paunch. "Mount up an' get after him!"

There was a scramble for the tie-rail and someone got off a shot and Slavins cupped

palms to his mouth and bellowed Jennings' name. "If you don't get him this time, you're finished as marshal in this town!"

Slavins lowered his hands, twirled his cane jauntily, and approached the rig. "Then what'll you do, Frank?"

Wills waited until the soft thunder of the posse's running had echoed out of town. "Why, I reckon I'll ride south and see if I can help the Mex patrol in any way." All puzzlement was gone from Frank Wills now and there was nothing he needed from the Judge.

Slavins coughed tenderly. "You wouldn't want anybody—hum—exhumed by that jury, would you?"

Wills flicked his whip and drew back on the reins and pranced his horse. "No, Judge, I wouldn't." He had to make time, now. He had to roll out to the hill and spade up the surface of a dummy grave, then get across The Line with Sam.

Wills untucked a silver dollar from his pocket and held it out to the Judge. "I may not be back. Will you give this to McGunn for me? I kind of suspect he earned it."

Slavins took the coin, flipped it, caught it, and turned away. He stomped toward the steps of the court house, cane stabbing the planks as he passed.

Green shoots were already growing through the charred smear where the 'dobe had been. Wills socketed his whip and lashed his reins around it. He worked open the sack and peeled it down. "Come on out now, little feller. You're back home."

Sam didn't know what to say. Panchito didn't seem like a man you could thank or flatter. So Sam just stood there, blinking.

Wills unlashed his reins. "I don't think anyone'll bother you, ever again." He tapped his pocket. "I'll leave this derringer off with O'Brien when I pass his place. Reckon he might want to sell it someday."

The whip hissed, the horse heaved forward, and Frank Wills rolled south toward Mexico.

Spanish Sam stood watching him until the rig was tiny in the distance. He stood watching him until the rig was out of sight altogether.

Then he turned toward where his house had been, planning already how he'd rebuild it, with a private shelf for the crucifix high on the middle wall.

FAST TROUBLE MAN

*"You can cross a desert with hosses,
mister—but you cross a man with
your gun!"*

*Then he ripped into Grinder
like a house afire. . . .*



WHEN I first went to work at Hoe, the big horse outfit that headquartered on the Nowood River, Old Man Struthers was buying new stock in Oregon, where they had plenty ponies and no market, and trailing a thousand miles to Wyoming—where good horses was scarce as good women, and a man could almost name

his price for one or the other, delivered.

"They say that whole country out there is overrun with wild horses and purty girls," the Old Man said to us the day we entrained at Rawlins for the trip to Baker City. "The most of it descended from the

By DEE LINFORD

heavy work an' saddle stock the old-timers trailed in with the wagon trains. If it's anywhere near the high class stuff I hear it is, I'll grab up everything I can lay my hands on."

There was five of us making the trip with him, counting big Frank Grinder, his foreman. We took nothing but our beds and warbags and saddles, and if the Old Man did find horses, it meant a long ride back, looking a bunch of switchers in the tail. But right then, I wasn't thinking about horses.

"How about it, Hackamore," I said to young Tom Hackett, the baby of the crew. "Think you an' me could maybe lay a rope on some of that stuff out there?"

And that got a grin from all but Hack, because everybody knew he didn't shine much around the ladies. Rest of us used to read the heart-and-hand bulletins like they was our Bible, and usually we rode to town of a Saturday night, to pay our respects to Hansey's harridans at the Tensleep bar. But this Hack was only nineteen or so, and plenty on the serious side. Big for his age, and knowed it, and a Goin' Jesse around the ranch. But he didn't do much tearing around. Just stuck to the bunkhouse nights, banked his checks with the company, and talked about having a place of his own.

"Well," he said to me in his biggety way, never cracking a smile, "if you're talkin' about horses, I just *might* lay hands on some. Might trail some back in the bunch, if it can be arranged."

He was looking at the Old Man as he said that last. But it was big Frank Grinder that answered him.

"You need horses, boy, about like a hog needs hairpins."

"Oh, I don't specially need 'em," the kid admitted, still talking straight to Struthers. "But I expect a man could turn a dollar on a few head of his own. I got money to manage a few, if the other can be fixed."

Now this Frank Grinder was plenty big, and plenty tough. Had a sweet way with horses, as long as they responded to handling and didn't ever rear back at him. But let one go stubborn and start to fighting him, and Frank was hell a-horseback. I'd seen him throw a wall-eyed fit and stomp a colt 'til it couldn't stand. And his way with men was just the same.

I mean, as long as you did your work and laughed at his jokes and toed the line,

he was mighty fine to work for. But if ever you got him down on you, the only thing to do was just to roll up your bed like an Arab, and as silently steal away. Because once he'd got it in for a man, Grinder could do a pretty good job of living up to his name.

Now I'd found the surest way to rasp him was to go over his head to the Old Man on something that had to do with company business. And I'd heard him tell Hackett in no uncertain terms back at the ranch that he wouldn't be driving any private stock back in the Old Man's bunch. Heard him say he wasn't undertaking no pool drive for two-bit horse dealers, and as long as Hack worked for the outfit he'd better stick to wages and leave the business deals to the company.

Now here was our Hackamore, broaching the subject to the Old Man in front of Frank and everybody, just like Frank hadn't already put his foot down.

"Well," the Old Man said, innocent enough, "I don't see nothing wrong with a man turnin' a dollar he's worked for, and laid by.

"So many people any more don't have no idea what a dollar's for," he went on, looking at the rest of us. "I kind of like to see a youngster take interest in somethin' besides booze and women. I don't see nothing wrong with you trailin' a few head of your own back, son. I think it's a sound idea."

Well, Frank didn't say a word. But his face took on the puffy, swelled up look I'd seen on it the time he'd lost patience with a colt and hammered its head in with a neck-yoke. I started to feeling kind of unhealthy about Hack.

"Blamed, high-headed young switcher!" Moss Tappan, my seat pardner, said to me. "He stands to be took down a notch or two."

"Oh," I said, hopeful as I could, "he's just a hammerhead. Maybe he'll shape up."

"Frank'll shape him, quick as he gits him alone," Moss predicted. "But I don't expect the shape will be a purty one."

I figured Moss was right, and I didn't like it. I mean, that kid was awful bronky and full of snorts, and nobody'd ever got around yet to breaking him to bridle. But he was clean-cut and toted square, and showed plenty promise.

It wasn't any hide off me, but I couldn't help wishing he could have been gentled

right instead of being "grindered," as we called it when Frank took after a balky colt and stomped it out.

WE UNTRAINED at Kelton, Utah, where the U. P. bent south towards Cal, and staged on to Baker City on the Holladay coaches. It was the middle of March when we got in. But the winter was wide open, and we started our gather right away.

By May first, we had near a thousand head on feed in the Thief Valley up from Baker, all branded and ready to trail. Had a mountain-gauge wagon with a chuck-box on the back and an old army cook to drive it. Had four Oregon riders hired, which made nine of us for the drive, and no worries—we thought.

"Now I want you to break the whole band out, on the trail," the Old Man told us the day before he bid us adieu. "An' by that, I mean gentle them to ride, not to twist 'em out to buck. We won't be unloadin' these lovelies on any army buyer or railroad grad-in' contractor. These here are goin' to top the market.

"Just follow the Oregon Trail east through South Pass," he told us. "These Thief Valley boys know the way that far. You git through the pass, just turn north over the Owl Cricks, an' you can't git lost."

"When you goin' to look for us in?" Frank wanted to know.

"When I see you comin'," the Old Man said. "There's a sight more grass between here an' home than we got on the Nowood. An' I got no orders to fill 'til fall. So take what time you need. Just bring 'em through topped off an' in good flesh, an' don't let nothing worry you."

Well, for men that fancied horses, that was just like getting the whole summer off, with pay. And, such horses as we had, no man could have helped fancying them.

I'd never seen anything like the kind of animals we bought up for a little of nothing, there in that dismal Malheur and John Day country. Big, slab-sided range horses and lighter driving stuff that would dress up any kind of rig you put it to. Saddle ponies that weighed from nine to twelve hundred pounds, which was a heap of horse to men accustomed to the spidery Texas stock you found mostly in Wyoming. All wide between the eyes, and just as smart as they

looked. All small-hoofed and big-chested, with good bottom and disposition throwed in: All active and quick as quarter horses, ideal for roping and cutout work. Finest horses in the world.

"I allus felt privileged to ride for a horse outfit, an' leave the caows to the bull-punchers," old Moss twanged the first day out. "But this here, it beats anything I ever dreamed about."

And he'd said just about what I was thinking. But I had other things to think of, too. Because this young Tom Hackett had showed up the last minute with twelve of the sorriest looking switchers I'd ever laid eyes on, and I saw trouble coming right then.

Besides being so old and fat they could all have been in opera, Hack's stuff was way off-color. All paints and palomillas and curdled roans. "Injun ponies" and "skule-marm horses" we called them in those days, because your stockmen and freighters favored solid colors, and the only place you saw the gaudy ones was around the agencies and towns.

"Quite a string you got there, Hack," I said to him. "But they're hell-sure hard on the eyes. You aim to start a circus somewhere?"

"I know what I'm doin'," he said to me, by way of letting me know it wasn't none of my concern. But I was thinking of the way he'd spoiled the big band's looks, and the thousand of miles we had to trail, and I wasn't too sure.

"I just hope you do," I told him.

Well, we got under way without any fuss or feathers lost, and up until the trouble hit us, I never had a better time. Weather was fine and the new grass coming—the days so long up in that north country that we scarce had any nights at all.

At first, the switchers all turned up their noses at the dry old grass that was plenty on the ridges, and starved down some trying to fuel their bellies off the short, green growth. But we just lazed along, trying out new ponies every morning and noon. Riding each one two or three saddles a week until it was topped off. Babying them along like the Old Man said.

Some had been sold us as already broke, and they'd gone through their paces plenty sedate while the dealers showed them off. But they rode the center-fire saddle in Ore-

gon, whereas in Wyoming we favored the Texas double-rig, for hard roping. And when them Thief Valley bronks felt that flank cinch grab them, they purely forgot their manners.

They weighed three to four hundred pounds more than anything we was used to, and men that could ride anything with hair on it east of the mountains got a rude introduction to the Oregon temperament. But once we'd coaxed the jump out of them and showed them what was expected, they all made fine actors. Good, flat-footed walkers, low-headed and quiet and sure-footed. Honest all the way through.

And if Grinder packed a grudge for Hackett, he didn't show it as long as Hack handed the outfit a square shake, and turned in his share of work. But Hack was a bit more enterprising than was good for him or us either, and he set out right from the first to improve his string.

A LOT of cattle was trailing out of Oregon then to Wyoming and Montana, and more of them riders than you'd think wanted fancy colored ponies to take back to their lady friends. The kid had called the turn on that, and went right to work trading around with the beef drovers we passed. Wasn't long until he'd started to build a pretty fair looking bunch of skates. But he got to spending more time off trading than tending to his job. And I started to see then why Frank had bucked him going into business for himself.

"Hack," Frank said one day at breakfast, "the Old Man seen fit to let you run your crowbaits in the bunch, again' my strong advice. Well, that's his affair. But when you go off neglectin' your work, it's mine. You're goin' to start pullin' your weight around here, or you can take your plugs an' make a drive o' your own. Which is it goin' to be?"

"Aw, go to grass," the kid told him. "I got the Old Man's permission to do what I'm doin'. You ain't goin' to run me off."

I saw Frank's face start to take on that puppy look, and I gave the kid up, right then.

"All right," Frank said. "So you're stayin'. Well, the Old Man said to twist out the bronky ones on the trail. I expect you're next."

Frank set down his plate, and stood up. The kid backed off, seeing he'd stepped into

something that wouldn't scrape off, but too damn proud to run. Frank got hold of him, and I thought he'd break him in two, right there. But, instead, he pulled him over to the wagon and sat down on the tongue, then wrestled the kid across his knee. Broke his belt, slid the pants down over his haunches, and spanked his bare behind.

Well, for a biggety button like Hack, that was worse punishment than ten years in the penitentiary. For a while, he fought like a scalded cat. But Frank Grinder was just too big to do anything with.

I'd seen Frank clean all five of the Countryman brothers in a brawl in Tensleep, and him not even get marked up. He handled that overgrown boy as easy as I would a six-year-old. Held his legs in a scissors and his head in an armlock, and hammered him raw. Every lick started up as high as he could reach, and came down like a pile driver. I thought every bone below the kid's belt would be dislocated.

Our Hackamore was getting grinded. And I think it grinded all the rest of us to have to watch it.

Frank was sweating by the time he turned him loose, and for a minute Hack just stood in front of him, shaking and blowing like a colt that's been tug-whipped. The part of him that I could see was red and purple, but I reckoned the part that was really bruised was in where you couldn't see it. He was fighting the tears like they was one disgrace he wouldn't give in to.

"Now that's what happens to little bang-tails that git to snortin' around like stud-horses," Frank told him. "An' that's just the first treatment. After this one, it gits rough."

The kid blubbered then. And I guess that was just too much for him, because he jumped Frank, swinging both fists. But Frank held him off with one hand and slawed him with the other. The kid went down hard. Out like a light.

"Now maybe that'll straighten some his kinks out," Frank said, looking around like he wanted the rest of us to agree with him.

But I'd got busy poking up the fire, and when I looked around I found everybody else had all found little jobs that needed doing, too. Nobody looked at Frank or at Hack either one. Nobody said a word.

Things went smoother after that. Or, they would have done, if Frank had let

them. The kid rode mighty high in his stirrups for a week or so, and he let up on his horse trading and tended strictly to business. But he didn't stand around for Frank any. Carried a sulky, go-to-hell look on his face that reminded us all of the way he'd jumped at Frank after all the hammering he'd took. And that was just like waving a red flag to Frank.

I'd seen Frank get it in for a horse that wouldn't take knocking around, and instead of easing off and giving it a chance to find itself, he would take its actions personal, and then its goose was cooked.

In particular, I remembered a snaky little peg horse he had stomped one day until it was blood from its tail to its ears, and couldn't stand. Always after, it behaved plenty sweet when Frank was on it. But it never did miss a chance to bite or kick at him, and that just made him frantic.

He kept knocking it around, swearing he would either kill it or cure it. And one day it cornered him in a box stall and kicked half the barn down around him. We finally had to shoot it to get Frank out.

This Hackett was going through his paces

for Frank, too. But he had a backbone that reached all the way from his hat to the seat of his pants, and in spite of the thing that had happened to him, spunk still showed all over him. That was the one thing Frank couldn't take, and he was after the kid all the time. Handed him all the dirty jobs that came up, and found fault with everything he did. Even booted him around sometimes, and called him things I wouldn't put a tongue to.

The kid took it, not having any choice, and didn't give Frank no sass. But sometimes his looks said things you couldn't put into words nohow, and that just made Frank worse.

"Frank," I said one day, "why not ease up on the button now? He was in the wrong, an' you put 'im right. But you keep on hazin' him, you're goin' to have something on your hands."

"I already got somethin' on my hands," Frank said to me, his face getting all puffy just thinking about the boy. "An' the only way to cure a spoiled one like that is just to stomp him out. That kind don't respond to any other kind o' treatment."

IS IT HUMAN OR INHUMAN? NATURAL OR SUPERNATURAL?
WILL IT DESTROY US ALL?

THE THING

from Another World!

HOWARD HAWKS'

Startling

MOVIE!



Well, I didn't agree with him, then. I mean, I'd always held that even your worst actors would respond to gentle handling, whereas abuse and bullying only drove the bad streak deeper in. But I was convinced before the trip was over that Frank's system had its points. At least, he showed me it would work when everything else failed.

THE big blowup finally came over a big rat-tailed, pink-nosed appaloosa mare a Montana trail boss hung on Hack. But I expect that if it hadn't been over her, it would have been over something else.

We camped one night near this Montana-bound beef herd, and they butchered out a stray they'd been saving 'til they could give part of it away, to save spoilage. They fetched half of it to our wagon, and their dog-robber came along, and he and our spoiler got into competition over who could put up the fanciest dishes.

We had steaks and roasts and plum duff, and a son of a gun in a sack. Somebody trotted out a jug they'd had stashed, and it was a red letter evening. But this Hackett got to swapping horses again, and ended up with that appaloosa.

It was a funny thing about that mare. If you left her color out of it, she was a top specimen. Absolutely sound in wind and limb, a wonderful running walker, well-reined and trustworthy as long as a man was on her back. But, damn her heart, she wouldn't stay in the bunch at night. And when she went, she always took a following of admiring young gelds along.

We'd bunched thirty or forty different bands to build the herd, and they all liked to keep their cliques, the same as people. So we'd belled the leaders in each string, and that took care of the general situation. But this spotted-rumped old witch of Hack's wasn't any string leader, and she was so infernal sly about her mischief that she had quite a career before we tumbled to her.

She'd always wait 'til dark to leave, and naturally she didn't win over any leaders. So we'd never hear a bell. And quick as we'd come upon her, and her gelds next day, she would drop back on the drag like she was being led astray against her will and better judgment, and we'd end up belling one of the others.

But her color made her conspicuous, and there was never a horse foaled that could keep Frank Grinder fooled for long.

"Hack," he said, about the sixth time it had happened, "that ol' mare is a bunch-quitter. An' she's cost us all the trailin' time that she's about to. Git shet of her, or I'll git shet of her for you."

Well, we was deep in the bandlands then, without no Indians or settlers around that Hack could hang her on. And, like I say, she was a humdinger to look at and handle. If the kid could have got her to a town where they went for spots and such, she would have fetched a fancy price. More than any other horse we had.

"How am I goin' to git shet of her out here?" the kid asked, looking white around the gills.

And Frank just grinned. I guess he was seeing another way to get at the kid, and that was what he wanted.

"If you don't know, I'll show you," he said. Then he stepped down off the rangy black he was riding, and slid the rifle out of the boot on his saddle.

"Don't shoot 'er, Frank!" the kid begged him, humbling himself to Frank for the first time. "Don't kill 'er. I'll keep her staked. I'll bell 'er, an' ride every night shift myself."

But Frank just laughed through his nose at him. Sounded for all the world like a big proud stud that's hot and rearing to go. Didn't say aye, yes, kiss my foot or nothing. Just went right ahead and pulled down on the old trouble-maker.

If everything hadn't shaped up just like it had, I don't expect any of it would have happened. We'd been in them Idaho lava beds for more than a week, and I'll put that country up with any in the land for devil's domain. No water deserving of the name, and dust every day so thick that if our horses stumbled they couldn't fall.

Lava rock cuts through bone like jagged steel, and we'd cold-shod as many ponies as we had iron for. But that hadn't been near enough to keep up mounted, and we'd had to ride the same animals every day, 'til they wouldn't move at all. The rest had gone tender and wouldn't trail.

We'd had a bad time in general, and we'd all wore down cross and edgy, Frank included. But what with taking hardship with the rest of us, and all Frank's hazing be-

sides, our Hackamore was in worse shape than any us others. I'd been watching him and worrying about him, because sometimes he looked halfway unhinged in his head.

I guess it was not being himself that made him crawl to Frank over that mare. But he'd as well have saved his breath. Frank went right ahead and shot, and made a perfect job of it.

The old witch was standing looking at him, kind of stupid like, and the slug took her square between the eyes. All her legs jerked sideways at once, just like she'd busted herself at the end of a ketch rope. She hit the ground on her side and gave out with a loud grunt. Then she just laid there, kicking and jerking.

I ONLY heard one shot, so the two of them must have come right together. I was still watching the breachy old appaloosa kick her last when I heard Frank swear. I looked around, and saw his horse was down, too, a hole in its head right where Frank had plugged the mare. Then I saw Hack, sitting on his horse about twenty feet away, a smoking pistol in his hand.

One look at his face, and I felt my scalp begin to crawl. The button looked crazy.

"That settles with the company—for the mare," I heard him say to Frank. "Now I'm goin' to settle up with you."

Well, all I could think of was that little black peg horse that went berserk and kicked the barn down around Frank that day. And Frank could have been thinking the same thing, because he wasn't even batting an eye. I guess he was maybe waiting for me or somebody to help him out, like we'd done that other time. But I felt a little different about this case. Besides, it looked to me like certain death to anybody that butted in.

"Come on," the kid said in a voice I'd never heard him use before. "Take a pot-shot at somebody that can shoot back. I'll send you to hell a-humpin'."

Frank just stood there, holding onto his rifle, like he didn't know what to make of things. Then the kid let in to cuss him. Called him things I never knew existed, and maybe didn't, outside of Grinder. After a while, it got to be evident that Frank was going to have to kill him or be killed, or he could never look himself in the face again, let alone the rest of us.

The same notion seemed to be getting to Frank, and for a minute I thought he was going to stand to it. You could see something building up in his eyes. But I guess it wasn't what I thought it was. And, the way things stood, I guess you couldn't altogether blame him.

I mean, at twenty feet, a pistol's got it all over a rifle. And the kid had made the same shot from a horse that Frank had climbed down to make. I guess Frank just weighed his chances and found them wanting.

I never thought I'd see him cave. Not in front of a trembly-chinned button that didn't even have a beard. But he had a hard choice, and I expect he made it the way that looked best. I don't reckon any of us know for sure what we would do in a case like that.

"Ash," he said to me, never taking his eyes off Hack, "come an' take this Winchester. I ain't about to shoot somebody over a plug like that one."

So, he made that pass at trying to give his backdown the look of something else. But I saw his eyes when I took the rifle, and I could see he hadn't fooled himself.

Quick as I had the rifle, the kid was down off his horse. "Then we'll settle another way," he said, tossing me his pistol. Then he ripped into Grinder like a house afire.

I don't know yet how such things happen. Maybe it's like a hopped-up horse letting in to run and winning races it shouldn't even showed in. For the kid was plenty high, even if the thing that lifted him didn't come out of any bottle. Or maybe, having sown-bellied once, Frank was whipped to start with.

I do know Frank looked like he didn't believe it when the kid walked up and swung on him. But he started believing it by the time Hack had landed a couple more.

Frank moved then, like a bear, grabbing for the kid. But while Hack was crazy, he wasn't so crazy he'd let Frank lay hold of him again. He sidestepped, instead, slicing at Frank's eyes again. Frank checked and turned, and the kid put a boot where it did the most good, doubling him over. Then he joined his hands together and clubbed Frank on the back of the neck, and Frank went down. Before he could get up, the boy jumped in and stomped him.

(Continued on page 113)

Sudden Sleep Bullet

Out of the long dead years it sought him out, that wayward gun he'd disowned, with its last six bullets that whispered: "A gun is good for just two things—to hang by a man . . . or hang a man by!"



By CHARLES BLAKEMAN

HE CAME slowly into town from the direction of Cheyenne Wells, letting his horse walk easily, resting his big palms on the pommel. He was a big man with no fat on him and on that ragged brown quarter horse, he seemed bigger still.

Judson Huntton, who ran the feed and hardware store, said later that it was notable the way his face was divided straight across; below a line running from one eye socket and over the bridge of his nose and under the other eye socket, his skin was pale.



Tom threw up the scatter gun and blue flame-lash leaped from its barrel....

Not white, but pale tan. And above that line, as far as an inch below his hatband, his skin was like mahogany. He had his hat shoved back as he rode into town, and that's how Judson Huntoon knew where he usually wore the band.

He came easily off the Cheyenne Wells road and turned into the broad trough of dust that was the town's single street of any consequence; everything else was an alley. The quarter horse's hoofs plucked evenly at the dust and raised it in little yellow curtains that sifted away immediately. The elongated, lop-sided shadow of man and horse flowed ahead of them as they came. And Judson Huntoon—afterward—had occasion to remark about that, too. Like an omen, he said. Like a purple omen.

The man passed the path leading up through the cottonwoods to the new schoolhouse and he passed the post office that was, actually, the front room of the grocery store, as Mr. Brenner ran them both. He passed the squat, brick roundness of the dusty structure marked LIBRARY—which years before, during the Indian wars, had been an arsenal—and then he swung his horse right and tied up at Huntoon's rail.

He strode heavily into the hardware store and pushed his hat farther back and nodded. "Afternoon."

It was a thin voice, a tired voice, that didn't match his frame at all.

Without another word the man snagged out his hand gun, flipped it, caught it, thrust it at Huntoon, and held it.

"You want to sell your gun?" Judson Huntoon had to swallow several times to help his heart back into place. This man had thrown down expertly, and there was no marshal in town.

"I got to, mister. I don't want to."

Huntoon swallowed once more, then accepted the gun. He turned it over a few times, snapped out the cylinder and stared through the bore. He flipped the cylinder back into the frame and hefted it. "A seventy-three, huh?"

"It's called a Peacemaker."

"I know that." Huntoon frowned down at it, then lifted it closer to his eyes. "What's this on the heel—where the buttin' used to be?"

"It's an initial."

Huntoon squinted narrowly at it, holding the Colt at an angle. "S."

"That's right. It was on there when I got it."

Huntoon peered up at the man, a smile beginning to come to his lips. "When'd you get it? This piece is more'n twenty years old." He lowered his eyes to the gun again.

"That's when I got it."

Judson Huntoon handed it back, sucking his mouth. "I don't know. They's not much market for guns around here. I doubt I could move it."

"It's never misfired—it's never been broke." The man faced the street then, attention caught by a passing rig. Its wheels streamed dust as the high-headed mare in the shafts pranced saucily past. Two people were in it, a male and a female. Its brake screamed and bit chains jingled, then went silent to the pull of reins.

Huntoon scratched the back of his neck. He didn't know what to do. Here came a stranger wanting to sell his hand gun, most unusual. And the stranger wore two shades of skin on his face, like he'd been wearing a mask. The Bellinger Boys always wore masks, and they were supposed to be south of Cheyenne Wells someplace.

"Come on, mister." The stranger placed grimy fingertips to the rear of his hat and tilted it forward the way he usually wore it. "It's worth five dollars anyway, ain't it?" He winked.

Huntoon had been thinking about ten dollars. The Peacemaker was a fine gun to learn on. You could hit popcorn in a high wind with any other gun if you'd started with a Peacemaker, and young Tom Spicer had said something about wanting to teach Miss Laura how to shoot. Judson Huntoon took his hand from his neck and reached for the gun.

"I'll pay five for it." No man likes to see another down on his luck, and that's what this man must be. Huntoon could see the uncombed, underfed horse and the ratty saddle rigging and frayed leather. He put the gun under the counter and paid out five dollars. "Free lunch across the street at the saloon," he needed to say.

"That's what I figured."

He left his horse on the tie-rail and ambled across the ruts toward the saloon. By glancing to the right, without turning his head, he could see the male and female walk away from the hitched rig and walk fast

toward the hardware store. They were laughing.

Something about the male made the man stop, on the opposite plankwalking, and turn full around. He watched him stand aside to let the girl enter the store. The girl was short for a girl, but nicely and strongly made out, as you could see from the rhythmic swing of her legs under their wrinkled denims. Her cropped red hair was held in a tight green band. Then the boy left his stance and followed her inside. The screen door clacked shut behind him.

THE man Hagen was perspiring. He sensed the wadded dampness of the five dollar bill in his big palm, and opened his fingers. The crumpled green paper smelled sweetly of the government ink that had been printed on it. Hagen stuck the bill into a side pocket and went in the saloon. He cocked an elbow at the round of the bar, where the pickle jar was, and asked for rye, double.

The bartender was broad, bland, and colorless. He smiled automatically and set out the bottle and indicated the jar.

"Ridin' through?" The question would have been an insult twenty years before, when men didn't ask questions unnecessarily; but now it was merely an attempt at friendly conversation.

Hagen lipped his glass, tasted it, emptied it. "Sort of." He pushed his hat back and hooked one battered boot heel against the polished rail. "One more, please." He considered taking a pickle, and didn't. He was hungry, woefully so, but not for pickles. "Chance of a man signin' around here?"

"Onto a brand?" The bartender corked the bottle and hit the cork with the flat of his palm. "Shouldn't barely think so. The Bellingers—heard of 'em—are out, and most folks're keepin' what stock they have in the cellar." The bartender chuckled at what he considered a humorous example of precaution. "All the herds are close-held."

Across the street, the screen door opened outward and the girl stepped through. She paused until the tall young man joined her, and they walked toward the rig. The young man had a brown paper parcel under his arm.

Hagen's diaphragm stretched queerly and the top of his brain seemed to come together in a knot. It was the same build, all right,

toting that parcel toward the rig. The same loose-kneed gait, the same careless hang to the shoulders. "Who're those folks yonder?"

The bartender looked, palm still on the cork. "That's Miss Clayton, just come to live here. Her, an' Tom Spicer."

Hagen gulped for breath to keep from choking. He raised his glass and placed the rim to his lower teeth and emptied it.

The bartender took his eyes from the rig. "Tom's dad has a place eight-ten miles out. T Bar S."

Hagen hit the bar too hard with the glass and cracked the thick bottom.

"Sorry. I'll pay for it."

"Don't bother." The bartender dropped the glass into a tin and brushed his hands. "Good to see a little violence around here 'casionally." He tittered, and wiped his mouth. "Down on your luck, huh?"

"Spicer?" Hagen tugged his hat forward to within an inch of his eyes. Damned odd, how people pop up from the old years, just when you'd about forgotten them. *Thomas Barr Spicer. He quit the business—why, hell, in '74, '75—to marry-up and have himself a kid. Said a kid was the only true immortality a man can ever have. . . .* And Hagen had laughed at him. Hagen remembered those things; those, and the one or two times Spicer had fritzed the play and they'd had to ride for their lives.

He put the five dollar bill on the bar and asked, "How do you get out to his place—the T Bar S?" He listened carefully as he pocketed the three singles he received in change.

He left town more alertly than he'd entered it. His big hands with the chipped knuckles weren't idle on the pommel, they were holding the reins against his bucklings. And his hat was down to his eyebrows, tight. Damned strange, how just a few faces stay tacked in your memory after twenty, thirty years of faces. It's hard to sort the old years out and make men come back and stand there a moment in memory while you examine them; it's harder still to hear their voices, or why they spoke.

But this Spicer—Tom Spicer—had been different. Lanky and good-natured, he'd been, and kind of clumsy with guns. Not the type for the business at all, so he'd quit it. A fighter, maybe, but not a gun-fighter. There's a difference.

Hagen thought of Eversole, lounging now

at Cheyenne Wells. Eversole was too much "Wanted One Thousand Dollars Dead or Alive" to ride the open country any distance from the Wells, so Hagen had volunteered to find some business for them, some work. Maybe this would be it.

At the cattle ford, Hagen splashed through the flashing, hock-high current and put his horse up toward the stand of cottonwoods that gave on a spread of newly-furrowed land. The plow hadn't cut much of it, just enough for a garden of sorts. Then Hagen was approaching a rambling, one-storied structure with pine-pitch caulking its planed boards and real mortar holding together the fieldstone blocks of the chimneys on either end. Smoke lipped from one to be hurried away on the light breeze. A line of chicks strutted across the yard after a hen, like little boys with hands in pockets. There were some box corrals and a barn beyond the house.

Hagen put his weight into his left stirrup and swung down. That was when he heard the sharp *snat* of a shot. He stiffened, hand clawing to empty holster. And a girl's voice shrilled happily. Hagen, walking toward the house, saw the rig by the barn, shafts empty.

A tall man limped into sight from behind the smoking chimney, bared head bent. He carried his hat, using it to scare flies.

He looked up then, and saw Hagen, and Hagen's horse snatching at bunch grass in the yard. He stopped scaring flies and lifted his hat to frizzy gray hair.

There came the *snat* of another shot. Someone whistled approvingly.

The tall man's nod of greeting was a chin-jerk, neither friendly nor unfriendly. His slumbrous eyes, tucked into the wrinkled beds of old smiles, roamed Hagen with slow curiosity.

Hagen said, "You must be Tom Spicer."

"That's right." Tom Spicer stepped forward, easy of movement despite his limp. "You seem familiar, somehow."

The hen waddled from sight, dragging her tottering chicks after her.

Hagen looked him over cautiously, trying to place him more clearly in memory. He wore neither belt nor gun, and Hagen wondered if the man had touched a weapon since the night near San Mateo Peak when he'd tossed the Peacemaker across the darkness and said, "This is yours. I'm through with 'em."

A third shot pecked at the silence and there came with it the slock of a bullet in wood. Young Tom's voice was urgent: "Now reload—don't stand there! Have your 'reload ready!'"

His father took one more step forward, puzzlement still clouding his eyes.

"Who're you?"

"I'm Hagen."

"Well—" The breath seemed to go out of him. "Well—ol' Hagen." There was no welcome there, no warmth. Tom Spicer was pulling him apart with his eyes, seekful not of what he knew or could guess, but of what he did not know and must suspect. "Well, well. Hagen."

Hagen squatted and picked a blade of grass and stuck it in his teeth. "You don't seem overjoyed to see me, Tom."

Tom Spicer's voice was brittle, like the cracking of greensticks. "What do you want?"

Hagen shrugged. Then he spat out the blade of grass and stood up. "Maybe some work. I got a partner. Maybe he'd like some too."

Spicer's face crumpled into an irregular pattern of frowns that added ten years to him. "Come into the house." He faced around and led the way, not waiting for his caller to go first. Over his shoulder he said, "I've just been checking stock, I haven't been home since yesterday. . . . If there's no whiskey, you'll have to excuse it."

SPICER kept the table between them. They sat there, watching the snapping coals in the fireplace flash orange on the copper bellies of the swingpots. Spicer stretched out his long legs and sighed.

"Name it, Hagen, then ride."

Hagen shrugged again. He was in no hurry. He took careful note of the tintype on the sideboard. It was of a handsome woman with a generous mouth and an understanding eye. Firelight flowed gently back and forth across the soft lines of the plate.

"My wife." Spicer cleared his throat. "She died last year."

"Uh-huh." Hagen raised his face to the rifles that were racked on antelope horns above the mantel. There was a cabinet on the log wall beyond them, containing hand guns.

Spicer was following his gaze. "We don't

use 'em much out here. No call for it."

"You never could use one anyway, Tom." Hagen pulled his left boot up to his right knee and settled back. "'Member the night you got hit in the leg by San Mateo? Hell, you could've plugged that deppity with a rock, he was so silhouetted."

"I guess I wasn't the type." It was coming out, now—the play, the pitch, the thing Spicer did not know and had to suspect. Blackmail, for lack of a better word. "I see you have no gun, Hagen." He leaned forward, selected a log, and slung it onto the coals. "Lose it somewhere?"

He sat back, keeping his face to the flames licking at the fresh log.

"Call it that."

Spicer nodded. "I gave you mine the night I quit for good."

"I kept it quite a while." Monstrous glee was surging up through Hagen at the thought of Spicer's son being out by the box corrals showing a pert little redhead how to use that gun. Hagen decided he must get it back, somehow.

"My son—" Spicer was speaking slowly, still staring at the fire—"has always been a good shot. That's him out back now, teaching someone how to shoot. He didn't see me come in. He doesn't know you're here. I'd appreciate it, Hagen, if you were not here when he enters this house."

"What?" Hagen let his crossed boot drop to the floor. "An old friend of his father's payin' call—an' no introductions?" His eyes swept the shaking shadows. "No likker served?"

Tom Spicer left his chair in one motion. He held his fists to his thighs, eyes terrible with temper. "I told you, Hagen—"

Hagen was on his feet. "Did you tell him anythin'?" He bent across the table, brows arched high. "Did you ever dandle

him on your knee an' tell him about the time his daddy kept lookout while the boys busted into the bank at Bridger's Pass? Did you ever tell him—while mebbe you were teachin' him how to handle his first pony—about the time his dear ol' dad put a bullet through the marshal's spine in Sudro City?"

"I never killed a man in my life, Hagen! It was you or Barshee did that!"

Hagen smiled. He relaxed. He pushed himself back into his chair. "The warrant, was for you."

"That's what you told 'em when they penned you up for three years, wasn't it?" Spicer's shoulders were sagging, his fists had fallen open.

Hagen sniffed. "I never did tell 'em you couldn't hit the sunny side of a mountain at three feet."

Tom Spicer collapsed into his chair and plowed his hair with his fingers and shook his head once or twice. He laughed sharply, briefly. "Twenty years, Hagen. It's a long time, even not counting the years you spent in jail, the months you wasted holed-up in canyons or down in Mexico keepin' clear of posses. . . . You should've quit, too."

Hagen laughed roughly. "An' had the only true immortality a man can ever have?" He laughed again. "I like it better this way Tom."

"Where's Barshee?"

Hagen was studying the cracks in his wide palms. "He had an argument with Mister Bat Masterson. Barshee lost."

It came to Tom Spicer that he hadn't heard the practice firing for several minutes. "You been with the Bellinger Boys?"

Hagen dropped his palms and regarded Tom Spicer with mock awe. "How'd you ever guess that?"

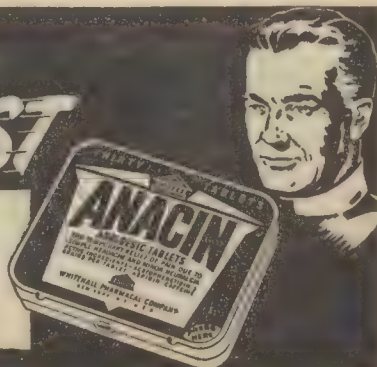
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Spicer didn't answer for a moment. He didn't know how to play this thing, he couldn't yet analyze the odds against him. He was glad that his wife, at least, could not know of this; but he was certain that young Tom would understand it if he heard it. He did not know how Laura Clayton would take it.

From the end of his mouth he said, "You've been wearin' a wind cutter up to your eyes. You're off your luck, because the Bellingers are breaking up. And you have a quarter horse, which is bred for speed and not range work." Full at Hagen he asked, "Where's this partner of yours? Who is he?"

FOUR feet tumped out-of-step on the veranda, the door shuddered open and the red-headed girl swung in followed by young Tom Spicer. He waved the Peacemaker, holding it by the barrel. "Thought I saw you come in, dad. I've been showin' a tenderfoot lady that all explosives are not in a young man's heart."

She made a face at him, turned about, and made a confession. "Mr. Spicer, I think we've ruined one of your cottonwoods. It was the target tree."

She held the image of Hagen in her level gray eyes for an instant, then smiled and offered a gloved hand.

Hastily Tom Spicer introduced them. "Mr. Hagen is an old friend. Miss Clayton is our new librarian, schoolteacher, and latest blossom to bloom in these parts."

Young Tom was wary of Hagen. He didn't like the way Hagen hung onto Laura's hand until she had to twist it free—and he didn't like the way Hagen looked at him. Faint contempt and a certain amusement were in the man's face.

He said, "Well, my old friend's son. Your daddy an' me—" he winked at Laura—"have been discussin' old times. Haven't we, Tom?"

Laura smiled more broadly at Hagen. "I'll bet you've had some, too, Mr. Hagen."

Anger crawled through young Tom Spicer like a live thing. He needed to hit this man with the rough face and misshapen hands and insolent voice.

Hagen was saying to old Tom Spicer while talking at Laura Clayton, "Things have surely changed around here. You got

a post office an' a school an' all that—but no town marshal! I should think marshals would still be necessary." He craned his neck. "Wouldn't you, Tom?" He lifted his shoulders. "I mean—think of all the men should have warrants still on file somewheres for 'em. An alert marshal, now, he'd—"

Tom Spicer barked, "Where'd you get that, son?"

"This?" Young Tom spun the Peacemaker and caught it by the butt. "Down at Huntoon's. Only ten dollars, too. It's the best school gun in the world, an' as I was explainin' to our schoolteacher—"

Spicer's hand darted out and snatched the gun and jerked it to him. He knelt by the fireplace, examining everything about the piece. He cocked it at an angle and frowned at the butt. He thumbed the shackle where the butt-ring had been.

When he stood up and faced them, his hands were trembling slightly. "I thought, for a minute . . . when I was a kid, I had one like it." He stopped, and hefted it a few times.

His eyes were absolutely empty.

A cold smile settled on Hagen's face. "Why don't you buy it back from him, Tom? I mean, if it reminds you of your youth."

Young Tom walked around them and kicked at the fire. He lay a new log on the coals and wedged it the way he wanted it. "Go ahead, dad. Take it." He wiped his palms on his trousers. "Heck, I can get another one 'most anytime."

Tom Spicer's smile was gentle. "I would kind of like to have it, son. Tell you what—I'll give you twenty dollars for it."

Hagen started to laugh, and coughed instead. "Dollar a year, eh, Tom?"

Both Spicers began talking at once, and both broke off. Old Tom said, "Yes, you'll take twenty for it, boy."

"Heck, dad, you can have it." He folded his arms and rested his weight on one narrow leg. "It's not often a man comes across somethin' like that, that makes him think back."

"Twenty dollars." Old Tom paid it from a leather purse. He thrust the Peacemaker deep into his hip pocket. "A dollar a year is about what it averages out to, for some people."

Hagen inclined his chin. "What are the wages here on the T Bar S, Tom?"

Tom Spicer said, "I forgot to tell you kids—Mr. Hagen, here, is goin' to ride fence for us a while. Until things calm down."

Young Tom recognized the uneasiness in his father's voice. He had heard it before—when his mother had chided her husband about being so modest concerning his past; when his mother was dying and the doctor had told old Tom and he'd tried to tell his son—and he didn't like the sound of it now.

Abruptly he said, "I'll take Miss Laura back to town." He wasn't wanted in that room, he knew. "Come on, Laura."

Hagen took his hat. "I'll ride with you, if I may. I got to send a letter."

Young Tom guided her elbow to the door. "If you can keep up with the rig."

The door bumped shut and Hagen was alone with Tom Spicer.

"What'd you do, Hagen—hock it in town?"

"Might have. Me an' my partner been pretty hungry these past few days."

Spicer stood wide-legged in front of the fire, arms down, favoring his weight to one side. "Since the Bellinger Boys started gettin' shot to pieces, I guess. Look here, Hagen, don't you try anythin'. Not here on the T Bar."

"Me? Why, me an' Eversole wish to lead calm lives, Tom. Violence is the last thought we got in our heads." He pulled the door open. "A favor for a favor, huh?" He went out without closing the door. He crossed the veranda and crossed the yard and took his horse and mounted.

The saucy mare was rolling the rig past the newly-furrowed garden land, prancing toward the road to town. Hagen put his quarter horse after it, at the trot, smiling in the shadow of his hat brim. It would be nice to run off a job without having to take orders from the Bellinger brothers. It would be nice, too, to get that Peacemaker back.

FIVE miles beyond the cattle ford, Tom pulled the rig off the road and into a grassy lane angling toward the outlying houses of town. He called, "You better do your errands an' get out to the north fence, Hagen. I'm taking Miss Laura home."

Hagen spurred past the rig and circled around the mare and grabbed her bridle. "I

was just thinkin'—Miss Laura—after talkin' about the old days with Tom Spicer I'm reminded of the many fine evenin's we've had together." He peeled off his hat and clapped it to his knee. "So perhaps you'd dine with me come Saturday an' I could tell you somethin' of those days." He only had three dollars, but Spicer would be glad to advance him some pay, he felt sure of that.

Tom heaved himself off the spring seat and see-sawed rein to break Hagen's clutch on the bridle. The mare backed, shuffling, and Hagen let go. Tom flicked the whip.

"I'd get out to the fence, if I were you." He sat down and braced his boots.

"But you're not." Hagen half-raised his hat. "How 'bout that, Miss Laura?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Hagen. Saturdays, I'm pretty tired. The library doesn't close until six, and—"

Tom slashed the whip. "You don't have to explain."

"—and the Huntoons lock up about eight—where I board. So—"

The rig rocked past Hagen and the whip smacked air and the mare lunged forward and tossed her head and lined out down the lane.

Hagen put on his hat, grinning. "Come on, fella. We'll do that some other time. Now take me to that post office."

Mr. Brenner stepped from the grocery store through a frame partition to the cubicle that was the post office. He took the letter and stamped it and handed Hagen ninety-three cents change. "Two cents for the stamp, a nickel for paper and envelope." Mr. Brenner read the address. "Cheyenne Wells, hey? That used to be a roost for the Bellingers."

"Used to be?"

"Well—" Brenner snickered with elation—"most of 'em were chased off, I hear. Only one-two left, nobody seems to know exactly which ones. An' two men—" he slid the letter into a pouch—"can't do much harm, can they?"

"They sure can't." Hagen dragged a forefinger across his upper lip. "When'll that get to the Wells?"

"Mornin' stage. Get there by late lunch."

Hagen went out. He would take a drink, some supper, and then head back to the T Bar S and find the north fence. That's where Eversole would meet him.

It was sterile, wind-lashed land out there,

with thin herds dotting the rises like scattered leaves.

Jack pine and alder huddled in the draws, timid except under full sunshine; heavier timber bearded the high ridges west of the T Bar range, miles beyond its fences. Hagen had been studying that timber for some time now, because by the time Eversole arrived things would have to be done in a hurry.

There was a pass growing from a deep fold in the slopes. It led into the high timber and—Hagen supposed—down the other side. That pass, then, would be the slot through which he would throw the herd. The Spicers wouldn't know about it for hours; and hours, converted into miles, can carry a rustle a long way if you know the country. Hagen was figuring three days to the border, using a split herd to confuse pursuers. He and Eversole could dump the steers in Mexico and cut back into Texas and stay there a while, taking it easy.

He walked his quarter horse along the rusted strands of fence, searching for rotted places that would cut nicely. He found several and marked them in his mind. There were only four other hands on the T Bar that season and they were on the south ranges where the big herd was, guarding it against intrusion.

Hagen decided to write Tom Spicer a letter from Mexico: *Thanks for the favor. . . .*

Indistinct on the wind he heard a voice cry out. He looked that way and saw the rig standing by a patch of alder. It was young Tom Spicer and he had Laura Clayton with him.

Tom pitched the gear to the ground before Hagen got there. "There's your bedding an' rations. Also, oats for the horse. He can forage for the rest."

"Thanks for the favor."

"My dad ordered me to do it, because you forgot to pack it yourself. As if you weren't planning to stay with us long." Laura touched his arm and he shook it off. "I'm inspectin' all fence, north an' south. You'll get a relief in four days. That's come Monday."

Hagen winked at Laura. "Cute, isn't he?"

She touched his arm again. "I've got to get back."

"Cute?" Tom snaked a leg groundward;

he set the brake and looped reins around the whip socket. "I tried to find out from my dad last night why he'd taken you on, an' he wouldn't say." Tom pulled his other leg from the rig and walked over to Hagen. "But maybe if I take you apart, I'll find out."

"Tom!" Laura showed her teeth with impatience. She started to get out. "Mr. Hagen, don't pay any attention to him."

"Why, Miss Laura, I'm shakin' at the very sight of him." Hagen kicked his stirrups clear and jumped down and landed six inches from the advancing Tom Spicer.

Tom stopped, half-crouched, arms cocked forward. "Drop your belt."

"Nothin' in it, kid."

"Thought it might get in the way." Tom's right ankle moved.

"In the way of what?" But Hagen's fists rose even as he asked it.

"Of this!" Tom's right hook lashed out and curved into Hagen's throat and scraped his beard stubble and drew Tom off-balance. He ducked instinctively and scrambled back two paces, dancing a bit.

FURY howled up through Hagen and rumbled in his head and dried out his mouth. He doubled forward like the cocking of a shotgun and rammed his head into Tom's chest and smashed him against the rig and let him drop to his hip and lie with one shoulder against the wheel spokes.

Agonized surprise in Tom's eyes faded to grimness. He leapt to his feet and waded in. He sprang like a gaunt cat and crashed a hammer-swift fist downward into Hagen's face and belted him against the quarter horse. The horse side-stepped and trotted away and Hagen tumbled onto his shoulders.

Hagen flung himself around to his knees and crouched there, licking the blood off his mouth as it seeped from his stinging nose. He hurled himself to his feet and swung like a hayrake and heard Tom gasp in pain and felt his ribs crack under the impact. Then Hagen was on him and they were thrashing on the ground, knuckles whipping and legs kicking. Tom drove the heel of his hand into Hagen's jaws and Hagen jacked up a knee and drove it into Tom's groin, heard him yell and felt him go limp.

Hagen got up, spat blood, found his hat and put it on. He walked unsteadily after

his horse, popping his fingers and clucking his tongue. When he had the bridle and was poking a boot into the left stirrup, Laura Clayton was helping Tom into the rig.

She was whispering to him, trying to lay her cheek to his ear and propel him upward at the same time. Hagen heard, "I'll drive you to the Huntoons', it's closer than the house . . . step up, now."

Hagen flung orange spit again and trotted up to the bedroll. "Hey, kid, ask your pa—'How immortal can you get?' Tell him I said to ask it."

Laura was savage at him. "You pig! Get off this range—it's for decent people! Get off it or I'll shoot you off it!" She put her tiny shoulder to Tom's squirming form and forced him onto the spring seat. She perched on the edge, unlooped reins, released the brake and suddenly cut at Hagen with the whip. It sang past his head and cracked smartly. The mare bucked forward and pumped her knees high and circled to the pull of the bit and broke into a gallop.

Hagen wiped his mouth and threw off and put his horse on a pin. Presently he began to break out the bedding and see what it had to offer. His knee ached dully.

The moon was high, small and frozen crystal when the quick triple notes of a whippoorwill caught Hagen's ear.

The triple notes fluted again.

Hagen came to his knees, cupped palms to pursed lips and answered.

A shadow detached itself from the shadows of the alders and Eversole stepped carefully into the moonlight.

"Got your letter."

"With just 'S. L. Evers' on the envelope? They must be dumb at the Wells."

Eversole pitched a smoke together. "They

are." He nodded at the alders. "I left my four feet back in there." He lighted up. In the flare of the lucifer his red face seemed redder still. "What's the lay out here?"

"You get my gun?"

"You ast me to." Eversole lifted it, twirled it, held it out. "I had to hit him twice before he stayed down."

Hagen took his Peacemaker and counted cartridges, then holstered. "Spicer?"

"He was alone. There was a Chinese in the mess shack. So—" he drew brightly on the cigarette—"I knocked on the front door, went 'round back, an' come up behind him."

Hagen had to know. "You kill him?"

"Nah! He was breathin' when I left. How'd he get your gun?"

"I had to hock it in town. I was that thirsty. I'd've hocked my hat at midday for a few drinks. Then that kid of his bought it, an' the old man spotted it an' bought it from the kid."

Eversole spouted smoke, bent down, and stepped on the cigarette. "You alone out here? Your old friend trust you that much?"

"He's got no choice. I know where there's a warrant for him."

"This ain't the main herd, is it?"

"That's held close, south of here. He won't trust me that far."

"Well? You want to move 'em?"

"I reckon we better." Things were piling up against him and Hagen was aware of it. It wouldn't take young Tom Spicer long to get his pain-shot body back together—it wouldn't be very long before someone found old Tom sprawled by the front door. "It's just right for two men. There's a pass beyond the fence, goin' west into the high

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country. The fence is rotten—you can clip it with your fingernails."

THEY worked without words, after the manner of experts. They sliced the fence where the grass grew thickest, the better to muffle running hoofs. They timed the throw to the moment when the herd, in reflex reaction to an eons-old instinct, rose from bedground to chomp grass-stained jaws and stare at the moon through deep-globed eyes. They got some leads started with boot nudges in the rear ribs, then circled the flanks and used popping strings on the slowly-forming drag. The poppers *thucked* against sharp hips and got motion. The herd bumbled toward the opened fence, wedge-shaped and uncertain. Eversole went ahead to keep the wedge pointing for the pass and Hagen rode back and forth across the drag.

Eversole had the point in the fold of the slopes that grew to the pass when Hagen heard hoofbeats filling the silences behind him. They were coming at him with the sound of fingertips drumming on a board.

He faced sharply about, Peacemaker heavy in his bare hand. A silhouette topped the rise where the cut fence was. It was joined by another, and another. The first one, Hagen knew, must be old Tom Spicer, who hadn't yet learned that a silhouetted man is a hit man.

"Halt!" The command ran down the night like the lone brass blat of a trumpet.

Eversole, four hundred yards in the darkness of the fold, gasped a question. The herd was beginning to mill—their eyes were catching starlight like flashes of cup-flung water.

Hagen saw the flame-spit from a bore on the rise. The shot slatted past him and whickered into the timber. He caught his trigger, held hard to the hip, elevated and fired. The first silhouette, the highest one, jounced upward and slouched downward.

The other two rose darkly and sank from sight, coming this way. Hagen could hear the bump of saddles and chitter of chains and tinkle of rowels. Eversole cried out in warning: "They're comin' apart, Hagen!"

The chopping of spade-tipped hoofs was filling Hagen's ears. He could hear the crackling of ankle joints and the clack of horns hitting together. His horse crow-hopped and whirled and plunged toward the

rise with the stampede rumbling after him from the fold. Eversole's hoarse cry was lost in the stamping of fear-crazed hoofs.

The two riders who had come off the rise pulled down, skidding, side-stepping. Young Tom Spicer threw up a scatter gun and a blue flame-lash leapt from its barrel and Hagen screamed to the multi-punctures of twelve-gauge shot ripping through him.

His horse was pitch-forked off the trail by a running lead steer and knocked into a sandy shoulder. It thrashed up the shoulder, slipped to its knees; scrambled above the running drive and turned crazily. Hagen cartwheeled off and clumped onto the grasses and never moved again.

"Laura!" Tom was bellowing it above the drumming of the stampede.

She was dismounted by Hagen, kneeling over him. She traced his right arm under its torn flannel and came to his frozen fist. She had to put force into it to pry the Peacemaker free.

Tom was up the slope, standing in his stirrups. Then he saw her getting off her knees. He saw her holding the gun out straight in both hands, arms stiff. He saw her hands jump up as the Peacemaker exploded.

The last of the stampede belted past and spread out toward the rise and scattered into the night.

Tom raked rowels and hurdled the slot-trail and put his horse onto the shoulder and sprang off and took the Peacemaker from her. "What you shootin' at, honey?" She didn't answer, couldn't answer. She was sobbing through her teeth. Then he saw what she had been shooting at—a squat man, hatless. A wide-waisted man crabbing painfully around in the gravel, one leg buckled under him, choking and gagging.

"Well—seems like we got a prisoner."

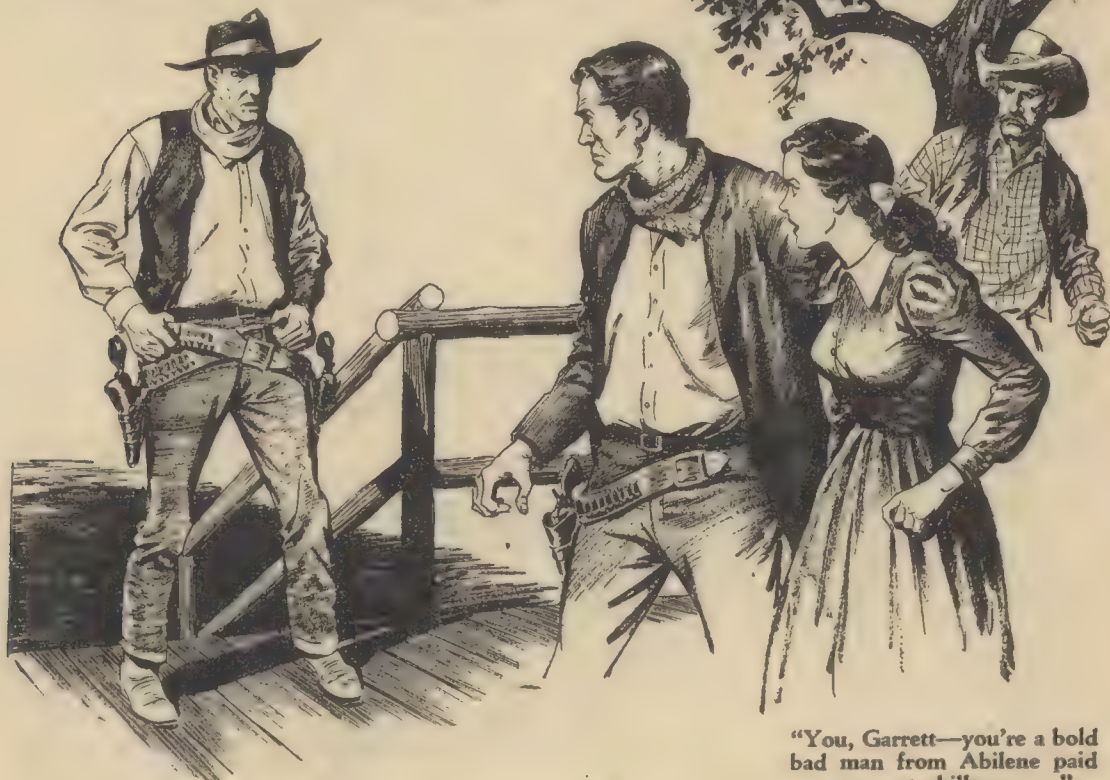
The moon was well down by the time Tom had lifted his father's body back to the bedding by the alders and wrapped it in blankets.

Tom Spicer took the Peacemaker, flipped out the cylinder and ejected the remaining shells. He clicked the cylinder back into the frame and tenderly tucked the gun into the blankets.

"That's where it belongs, Laura." He swallowed thickly, hat in hand.

She took his elbow, gently. "Let's all go home now."

For one more night the hell-raising ghosts of Showdown would come to thunderous life—was it long enough for Dusty Garrett to answer their challenge—"Live fast, mister—for you won't live long!"



"You, Garrett—you're a bold bad man from Abilene paid to come to kill me. . . ."

DEATH in the SUN

AS DUSTY GARRETT reined up in front of the La Paloma and pushed his sweat-stained hat back on his head, he imagined, for a moment, he could hear music and that the boards rising out of the dust to form a shaded walk on both sides were crowded with his kind. It was an illusion born of the heat. Showdown was dead. As dead as the two coiled rattlesnakes whose crumbling skeletons were guarding the doorway of the La Paloma.

Dismounting, he tied his gelding to a worn hitch-rack, loosened his gun in its holster, and entered the saloon. The dust of time lay on the tables and the bar. The back bar

was still lined with bottles, but all of the bottles were empty. Someone had prized off the middle keys of the piano. In the half-light strained through the unwashed windows it looked like the laughing mouth of a snag-toothed old man.

Retracing his steps to the walk, his boot heels sounding unnaturally loud on the rotting planks, Garrett walked the length of the street to the caved in false-front of a feed store. The sheriff's office had been next to the feed store. A sun-and-rain faded wanted dodger, announcing a thousand dollar reward, still clung to the bulletin board. The name and picture of the wanted man was

By DAY KEENE

gone. All that was left was the price on his head.

Garrett built a cigarette looking at it. Then tearing the scrap of paper from the board he crumpled it in his hand and walked back to the gelding and untied his bedroll.

The lobby of the hotel adjoining the La Paloma was in much the same condition as the bar. Room 205 was on the second floor in front, overlooking the street. The window was grimed with dust but the room had been swept and cleaned recently.

Tossing his bedroll in a corner, Garrett started to sit on the bed to wait for the man who had sent for him when a faint glitter caught his eyes. Stooping, he picked up a yellow tortoise shell hair pin and stared at it thoughtfully.

He was still looking at the pin when he heard the sound of wheels. Standing well back from the window he watched a covered wagon drawn by a team of tired looking bays lumber past the La Paloma. It was the black-haired girl he'd passed in the draw. The girl was still driving. Garrett wondered; as he had wondered then, where her man was and what she was doing with so many young ones. She was too young herself, too fresh and pretty, for her to have mothered them all. There were two boys and a girl on the seat beside her and four still younger children peeking out the back of the wagon. The two boys spotted the tied gelding and remarked on it.

When the wagon had creaked on toward the not distant grove by the river, Garrett went down and untied the gelding and retied it in back of the hotel. A man could never be too careful. Tomorrow would be different. Tomorrow there would be a lot of strange horses and strange men in town. Tomorrow Showdown would come to life again, if only for one day.

Back in the room he realized he was hungry. Food was the one thing he'd forgotten. Tomorrow there would be a dozen food tents at the encampment. But tonight he'd have to chew a stale cud. Garrett consoled himself with the thought that it wouldn't be the first time.

Night was as hot as day had been. Brann came shortly after dark. A stair creaked, the bat of a leather chap scraped the wall, and he was in the room. Leaning against the closed door he struck a match and looked at the man on the bed.

"You got here all right, I see."

Dusty Garrett admitted the obvious. "I'm here."

A big man with iron gray hair, Brann took a thick envelope from the pocket of his shirt and laid it on the bed. "His name is Digby. Three thousand now as we agreed. The other two after it's done." He waited for Garrett to pick up the envelope. "Well, aren't you going to count it?"

There was a glint of amusement in Garrett's flat gaze. "I don't think that will be necessary. What's this Digby look like?"

"Like a farmer," Brann said. "Lean, dark, raw-boned, with two gold teeth in front." He laughed. "Unlike most clodhoppers, though, he thinks he's a good man with a gun."

"It's a common failing."

Brann attempted to justify himself. "The Association can't have it, understand? If we let one farmer root on the west bank of the river, we'll have a hundred by spring. They'll crowd us right back into the mountains."

Garrett's lean capable fingers built a cigarette. "I didn't ask for reasons."

Brann wiped his perspiring face with his neck cloth and as he raised his arm his sleeve scraped across the silver inlaid in his vest. "We killed Showdown ten years ago in the Vernal Valley War. And we intend to see it stays dead. We don't want a town. We don't want settlers. There's not enough land for us all. We got here first. And by heck we're going to stay."

"All right—all right," Garrett said. Details and reasons always bored him. "So you intend to stay. Digby will be at the encampment?"

"He will. I've seen to that."

"I guess that ties it up then. Send the rest of the money to Abilene."

The big rancher said, "Right," and was gone.

GARRETT put the money in his belt and walked to the window. There was a steady flow of wagons and horses on the street now as dozens of small ranchers and farmers, finished with their chores, headed for the encampment. A few families hitched at the racks in Showdown to talk, but most of them drove directly to the grove.

There were as many women as men. A

group of children ran, whooping, up and down the walk. Then they discovered the piano in the La Paloma and pounded out a bass and treble duet of *Chopsticks* to an accompaniment of shrill giggles.

A roofed spring wagon painted a gaudy red and yellow passed and Garrett smiled as he read the inscription in the light of the rising full moon.

DOCTOR ULYSSES LOGAN'S
MAGICAL ELIXIR
OF LIFE

There went a clever rogue. With that combination of names how could he miss at a Grand Army Of The Republic encampment? From two hundred miles around the light-fingered gentry were gathering. There would be tumblers and strong men and pick-pockets. There would be Punch and Judy and three card monte and crooked race horse men. There would be whiskey and girl shows and brawls.

And at the end of a day or a week, depending on the state of their finances, the swindled but happy reubens would drive back to their bleak ranches and dry farms to spend a lonely year talking about what a good time they'd had. All but one of them. A man with two gold front teeth, a man by the name of Digby.

Feeling his way down the back stairs Garrett mounted the gelding and rode slowly towards the river. A lot had happened in a few hours. Two dozen campfires were blazing. There was a ring of hammers from one end of the grove to the other as the showmen and the gamblers put their platforms and booths together.

Somewhere in the trees a fiddler was

scraping a lively version of Old Dan Tucker and bearded men laughed as they collided in the dark while trying to erect their tents, and their wives tapped their feet to the music and twisted ribbons in their hair, as they sorted out bedding and tried to keep track of their children.

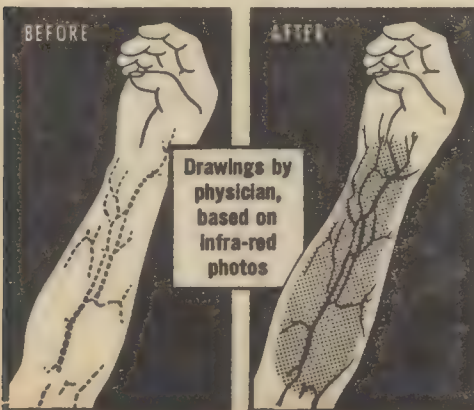
Even more rigs and families than had come through Showdown were pouring into the grove from the south road along the river. It would seem there was no end, or would be, to the men who had fought with Grant, or carried a gun under Black Jack, or marched to the sea with old War-Is-Hell Tecumseh.

Tying his horse to a sapling, Garrett made his way on foot toward a flaring coal oil jack nailed to a tree under which a profit-minded saloon man from Gilby had laid a plank across two barrels and, broaching a third, had announced himself in business by calling, "Come and get it, bully boys. It's genuine Monongahela."

Garrett bought a dipper of whiskey and walked on, looking for an eating tent. He had been right about chewing a stale cud. Seemingly none of the eating tents intended to open before morning. Then he smelled fresh-baked apple pie and tracked the smell to its source.

The sleeves of her calico dress rolled up over capable arms, a smudge of flour on her nose, looking somewhat older but even prettier than she had on the seat of the wagon, the black-haired girl was removing four pies from the oven of a wood stove set up under a canvas stretched from the top of the covered wagon to a tree. Four pies had already been set on a clean plank to cool.

As Garrett watched, she tested the heat of the oven with her elbow, added a few slivers



HOW SLOAN'S LINIMENT AIDS MUSCULAR PAINS

Here's vital news for sufferers from muscular aches and rheumatic pains. Using infra-red rays, scientists have now succeeded in photographing blood-vessels *below the skin-surface*. These photos (see pictures at left) prove that, after an application of Sloan's Liniment, the veins *expand* . . . evidence that the treated area gets *extra* supplies of blood, to revitalize tissues and wash away waste matter and poisons faster.

When you use Sloan's Liniment, you *know* that it is increasing the all-important flow of blood to the treated area, and that this effect *extends below the skin-surface*. No wonder Sloan's helps to bring blessed relief from rheumatic aches, arthritis pains, lumbago, sore muscles. Sloan's has been called "the greatest name in pain-relieving liniments." Get a bottle today.

of oak, and put four pies to bake. Then she turned to mix still more pie dough on a crude but clean worktable, formed by the tailgate of the wagon and lighted by two hung lanterns. The four youngest children weren't in evidence but the girl and one of the boys were peeling greenings while the other boy foraged for wood.

Removing his hat, Garrett stepped into the corridor of light formed by the glow of the stove and the lanterns.

"I beg your pardon, miss. Are those for home consumption? Or do you aim to sell those pies?"

THE girl continued to cut in shortening as she glanced at him. Her voice was as nice as the rest of her. "I aim to sell them, mister. I aim to double my money on a barrel of flour and three barrels of greenings that I bought in Gilby. But I didn't think we'd have any trade until morning."

"It's a bit a quarter, two bit for a half, four bits for a pie," the boy informed Garrett.

Spotting a coffee pot on the back of the stove, Garrett offered a dollar for one of the pies if the girl would throw in a cup of coffee.

The girl shook her head, smiling, "It's four bits for a whole pie. Any more than that would be highway robbery. And you're welcome to the coffee."

Paying her, Garrett ate the pie and drank an army canteen cup of black coffee, sitting on a log with his back against a tree. It was as good pie as he had ever eaten. Their name, he learned, was Marsden. The black-haired girl's name was Nancy. And she was oldest sister to Tommy and Jack and Effie and Vernon and Verla and Joe Josie, the younger children asleep in the wagon. Tommy, the next to the oldest was fifteen. Their father and mother were dead. All they owned in the world was the stove and the contents of the covered wagon. They were on their way east to Dodge City which Nancy had heard was booming and where she hoped to open a restaurant.

His mouth full of pie Garrett asked what had happened to their folks.

Nancy continued to roll pie crust as she talked. She was matter of fact about it. "We had a little spread a little north of here and on the other side of the river, up

in Elko County. But we were burned out four months ago and paw was killed and maw died of a broken heart. We've been living in Gilby since."

Jack laid an armful of wood by the store. "But I'm coming back some day and kill 'em, mister. I'm going to kill the rats that shot my paw."

Nancy glanced apprehensively at the sound-filled night around the wagon. "Please, Jack. Hush."

"I ain't afeard to speak my mind," the boy told her. "It's time someone spoke out."

Garrett knew how the boy felt. "I don't blame you, son. Who burned you out?"

"Stranger around here, ain't you?"

"Yes," Garrett admitted. "I am."

Tommy looked up from the apples he was peeling. "It was Hod Brann and his Association. They own half of creation now. But they ain't going to be content until they own all of the state with a purty pink ribbon around it. They don't want this country to develop. They want to hog it all for themselves." The boy jerked his head at the ghost town a half mile away. "I've heard paw say, time after time, that they killed Showdown dead 'cause they were afraid it might attract settlers and provision a few poor folks a trying to scratch a living from the land."

The pie heavy in his stomach, Garrett finished his coffee and stood up to go. He wished that he'd stayed hungry. Emotion had no place in the life of a man who made his living with a gun.

"We've a right to come to the encampment, though," Molly said. "Paw was a Grand Army man since eighteen sixty-seven."

"He was a sergeant with Sherman," Jack added.

"Could be I knew him, son," Garrett said. "I took that little walk, too." He turned his rare smile on Nancy. "Kind of taken on a little responsibility, haven't you?"

The girl hadn't lost her sense of humor. Her eyes twinkling, she said, "Haven't I? And it's mine for a long time." She laughed. "That is, unless I can find some fool man who will promise to love, honor, and support me and seven sisters and brothers."

Dusty Garrett's smile faded. "I don't know as he'd be such a fool," he said. Then, tipping his hat, he walked off through the

rising tempo of the encampment to his horse.

THE gelding had been moved from the sapling into the light of a campfire a few yards away. Four tall rawboned men were examining the horse and saddle and as they heard Garrett and turned he saw that one of them had two gold front teeth.

"You're Dusty Garrett, aren't you, mister?" one of the men asked.

Pushing his white, low-crowned, wide-brimmed hat back on his head, Garrett built a cigarette and licked it before answering. "Why, yes. It so happens I am. Why?"

None of the four men appeared frightened. They seemed more at a loss for words. Finally one of them asked, "You a member of the Grand Army?"

"I am," Garrett said. Putting the cigarette between his lips, he lit a match with his left hand. His flat stare never left the men's faces for an instant while the thumb of his right hand hooked casually in his gunbelt.

The four men retired to the far side of the fire and Garrett heard the man with gold teeth say, "I ain't afraid of him. You boys back away and let's get it over with."

The other three men argued with him. Then one of them returned to the side of the fire on which Garrett was standing and handed him the reins of the gelding. "Well, sorry to have troubled you, Garrett. You'll be here tomorrow, I suppose."

"I will."

On the other side of the fire, shaking off the two men attempting to restrain him, the man with the gold teeth said, "My name's Digby, Garrett. And I'll be here, too. It can be we've figured this all wrong. But if we haven't, I'll be here."

Garrett mounted the gelding and rode out of the light of fire, his back muscles instinctively tensing against the impact of a shot that didn't come. He'd been a fool to leave the hotel. He might have known he would be recognized. A man couldn't sell his gun for five years and hope to stay out of the limelight. Now, if he managed to kill Digby, if he gave him first go for his gun, he'd have the whole camp on his neck. It could be he'd have to ride instead of pleading self-defense.

The horses and rigs were gone from the racks in Showdown and the town lay dead

in the moonlight. Getting a dusty chair from inside the La Paloma, he sat on the walk in front of the saloon, thinking. He thought a long time.

He was riding a horse as dead as Showdown. The old order was passing. The men at the encampment, Digby included, were farmers. But they had also been soldiers. Death was nothing new to them. They weren't afraid to fight, and die if need be, for what they thought was right.

He could kill Digby tomorrow. He intended to. He'd ridden three hundred miles to do so. But some day a Digby would root on the west bank of the river and a thousand other men with plowshares on their wagons would pour through the breach his courage had poked in the dike. There would be no stopping them. Showdown and a hundred towns like it would spring to life. And it would only take one man.

He thought of the black-haired girl. She was pretty. She was capable. She was loyal. The firm flesh of her arms in the lantern light had been as white and soft as the fur on a snowrabbit's belly. Nancy would make some man a good wife. With two most grown boys and two on their way up, a man could ranch a fair-sized spread without having to hire one hand. A shame their father hadn't been a better shot. A man with sense enough to marry Nancy wouldn't be a fool.

The fires down at the encampment had died and the shouting and music were stilled when he finally stabled the gelding in a shed back of the hotel and climbed the back stairs to 205.

In the room he removed his gunbelt and his hat and, kicking off his boots, lay on the bed. But sleep was long in coming.

After a time he struck a match and taking the tortoise shell hairpin from his pocket he looked at it, wondering if Digby had children and if Mrs. Digby was a blonde.

Against the chance she was, he unrolled his bedroll and spread it on the floor. Sometime, toward morning, he slept. . . .

THE spring, walled with brick to a height of three feet to keep the young children from falling into it, was in a clearing fifteen rods north and south by ten rods east and west, opening on the river on one side. It served as a meeting place and as many of the games

and shows and eating tents as could, lined the three wooded sides of the clearing. There was also a speaker's stand and a large, unroofed dancing platform.

Here and there a tree had been left for shade. Garrett ate breakfast with the Ladies Aid from Gilby. He washed it down with a dipper of whiskey purchased at the plank counter of the saloon keeper from the same town, then made a circuit of the clearing looking for Digby.

The man with the two gold teeth wasn't in the crowd before Doctor Ulysses Logan's wagon, the snake oil pitch next door, any of the ball games, the shooting gallery, or the bell-topped test of strength.

Surly-faced farmers and small ranchers stepped aside to allow him to pass. Their women whispered behind his back. The news that Dusty Garrett was at the encampment to try to kill Bill Digby had been well-spread. And he was welcome as a weasel in a henhouse.

Unable to find Digby he returned to Sundown and his chair in front of the LaPaloma and spent the morning watching the ghosts plow through the dust in the shimmering sunbeams. Early afternoon was a repetition of morning except the crowd had swollen still more and the pink lemonade and church ice cream stands were doing more business than the saloon man.

He was leaning against the bunting-draped speaker's stand eating a dish of ice cream and sifting the crowd with his eyes when Tommy Marsden tugged at his gunbelt.

"Sis wants to see you, Mr. Garrett."

"What about?" Garrett asked him.

"She didn't say," Tommy said.

Garrett sifted the crowd one last time as he returned the empty ice cream dish and was amused to see Hod Brann, very uncomfortable looking, but determined to impress the peasants, wearing a colonel's full dress uniform, white sword belt and all.

A man resembling Wyatt Hardy was walking a few steps behind him. Garrett couldn't be sure it was Wyatt until he saw Kid Gamble. Then he knew. The two gunmen were inseparable. And they seldom bothered to call a man out. They much preferred to turn their tricks from ambush. He was wondering if the Digby crowd had had sense enough to hire them to back Digby's play when Tommy tugged at his gunbelt again.

"Sis says it's important."

"Okay," Garrett said. "I'm coming."

He walked through the crowd with the boy. No wonder the three men with Digby hadn't wanted to force the issue last night. They had been waiting for their reserve. It was, in a way, Garrett thought, very funny. Neither the Digby nor the Brann crowd had the intestines to fight their own battles. Both sides had hired professional killers. Well, he could buck the Kid and Wyatt as well as Digby if he had to. But from now on he would be careful how he exposed his back.

NANCY had circles under her eyes the size of silver cartwheels, but the range was still going full blast in the breathless afternoon heat and even the younger children had been put to peeling greenings.

When Nancy saw him she laid a floured hand on his sleeve. "Thank heaven—you've got to get out of here, out of Showdown, right away, Mr. Garrett."

"Why?" Garrett asked flatly. "And how come you to know my name?"

She said, "It's common knowledge around the encampment. I mean who you are. And how Brann and the Association have brought you in to kill Digby."

"Oh," Garrett said softly. "I see."

"What they don't know," the girl continued, then looked at Jack. "Get me a small piece of oak, Jack." She described the size piece she wanted with her hands. "About so big."

The boy protested, "But, sis—"

Nancy clapped her hands. Hop."

Jack hopped, unwillingly.

"What they don't know is what?" Garrett asked the girl when he had gone."

She said, "That Wyatt Harvey and Kid Gamble are also on the Association's payroll."

Garrett took off his hat and rolled the brim in his hands. "You know that to be fact?"

"I do. It was Wyatt Hardy and Kid Gamble who shot my father."

"Oh," Garrett said.

A lot of things were clearer than they had been. No one had seen him ride into Showdown. He hadn't left the room until dark. The saloon man at the encampment hadn't know him. He hadn't spoken to anyone except Nancy and her brothers and sister. He

hadn't identified himself to them. Still, when he had returned to his horse, Digby and the three men with him had known he was Dusty Garrett.

There was only one person who could have spread the news. That was Hod Brann. And there was only one reason why Brann and the ranchers who sided with him could want him identified—he had done them too many "favors." And now that the fight to keep their vast holdings intact had reached the crucial stage, he had become embarrassing to them. He knew why too many had been buried.

They wanted him to kill Digby. They had paid him three thousand dollars to kill Digby. But after he had killed Digby, Wyatt and the Kid would help the crowd hang him. His death would serve two purposes. It would temporarily mollify the farmers piling up on the east bank of the river. And he would be one with the ghosts in Showdown, dead in the afternoon sun, unable to talk if he wanted to.

Garrett replaced his hat and built a cigarette. "Thanks. But how come you to warn me?"

Nancy looked at him a long moment. "I like you. I liked you when you tipped your hat when you passed us in the draw. I like you because you didn't try to give us charity last night. When I said a whole pie was four bits you paid it and that was an end to it."

She hesitated and there were tears in her eyes as she added, "Besides, paw used to talk about you by the hour. He said you were the bravest damn' captain in the Union Army, that you never told a man to go anywhere, you wouldn't lead him."

"Marsden? Sergeant Marsden?" Garrett said softly. He spread his hands in a futile gesture. "It's been ten years. There were so many of us. We had so many replacements."

Nancy wiped her eyes on the back of her hand and left a streak of flour across her cheek. "Then when there was talk of you killing this man or that, paw always sided with you. He said there was more good than bad in you. He said you always gave the other man a fair shake and that was more than could be said for droughts and grasshoppers and polecats like that Hod Brann."

Tommy's eyes were the size of a pie tin.

"Gee, mister. Are you really Dusty Garrett?"

"I'm afraid so, son," Garrett admitted.

He looked back through the trees to the spring in the clearing. Well, he'd asked for it for years. It would seem he was going to get it. If he backed down and didn't try for Digby he might get out of this mess with a whole hide. But the respite would be temporary. Every yapping dog he'd silenced in the last ten years would be in full bay again as soon as the news spread that Dusty Garrett had turned yellow.

On the other hand, if he managed to shoot it out, successfully, with Digby, the Kid and Wyatt, and probably Brann, were standing by to help throw him to the lions. Garrett looked up thoughtfully at a stout cottonwood limb. It was about the right size and a convenient height from the ground.

"What are you going to do?" Nancy asked him.

"I don't know," he admitted.

HE WALKED back the way he had come but instead of resuming his position against the bunting-draped speaker's platform, he stood with his back to a tree not far from the crude dance platform.

Four fiddlers were tuning their bows on the platform now. A drummer was testing his drums. Then a trumpet blared, one of the fiddlers scraped his strings in a quick staccato, and a bearded man cupped his hands to his lips and bellowed: "Junket—junket—junket—junket!"

The call re-echoed throughout the encampment. "Junket!" Junket! Junket! Choose your partners for the dance."

Boys and girls in their teens came running. Slightly older couples, most of the women carrying babies with toddlers clinging to their skirts, followed at a somewhat slower pace.

"My land. It's been a year since I danced."

"Mind you get in the same set now."

"This is what I come for."

The dancing was one of the biggest things at the encampment and the only one all of the campers could afford. Outside of the spring water and the speeches and the fights, it was the only amusement that was free.

Each set held six to eight couples. There were ten sets on the big platform and twice that many couples waiting on the sidelines

eager to fill in as soon as a dancer was winded.

*"Mush follow the daddy, oh,
Thar's whiskey in the jug. . . ."*

Garrett built a cigarette as he watched the dancers start at the prompter's call. There was still no sign of Digby. Wyatt and the Kid were on the far side of the platform alternately watching him and the blonde in the too tight dress with whom Hod Brann was dancing.

Garrett stopped a passer-by and asked the man if he knew the name of Colonel Brann's partner.

The man peered over the top of his glasses. "Why, sure. That's Mrs. Bill Digby. Purty, ain't she?"

Garrett fingered the tortoise shell hairpin in his pocket. "Yes. She's very pretty."

The man, realizing, tardily, who Garrett was, scuttled on to drink at the spring. Garrett moved to the shade of a tree a few yards closer to the dancers. The sun beat on the planks of the unshaded platform until the pitch in them bubbled.

He was wearing his coat but Garrett felt surprisingly cool. The showdown wasn't far away. It couldn't be. Digby was on the same spot he was. He had to show his face, or crawl. Garrett looked at the laughing woman in Hod Brann's arms and felt sorry for the man. He wished he didn't have to kill Digby. He would much rather kill Hod Brann.

Then he saw Nancy. She had washed the flour from her hands and dress.

She stood tapping one foot to the music, looking wistfully at the dancers, her slim body swaying in time. Several of the young bucks crowding the edge of the platform turned as if about to speak to her, then changed their minds and Garrett knew what they were thinking.

Times were hard. Food was scarce. A man was hard-put to feed his own. And she had seven brothers and sisters. On impulse, Garrett strode forward and took her arm.

"How would you like to dance?"

Nancy's face lighted. "I'd love to." The glow faded and fear for him replaced it. "But—"

"I'll know when the time comes," he told her. He helped her up the stairs and touched the male of a dancing couple on the shoul-

der. "Drop out, son. You're looking tired."

The youth said, "Now see here, mister." Then, recognizing the man who had tapped his shoulder, he swallowed hard. "Yes, sir. Come to think of it, I am tired, Mr. Garrett."

Garrett and Nancy took their places in the set, Nancy laughing so hard she had trouble in keeping step. Garrett asked her what was so funny.

She told him. "You."

Garrett asked her what she meant but before she could answer the man next in line swung her away from him, and then they were so involved in the intricate figures of the set he had to keep his mind on the didoes he was cutting. They finished the square dance, then went immediately into a Paul Jones and from that into a round dance.

Her cheek nestled against his chest. Nancy fitted into Garrett's arms as if she had been cut to size. Holding her he forgot the heat and the music and Digby.

"You dance well," he complimented.

"Thank you, Mr. Garrett," she smiled. "I could say the same for you. But let's say we dance well together."

Garrett held her a trifle tighter. "You think you'll like Dodge City?"

Nancy shook her curls in his face. "I doubt it. I'd much rather go back to our ranch."

"You're serious?"

"I am."

"A two-bit spread a little north of here, west of the river, in Elko county."

"That's right."

"Where your father was killed by Wyatt Hardy and Kid Gamble."

"Yes."

Garrett danced in silence for a long moment. Then he said, thoughtfully, "It being, as it is, on the west bank of the river, it'd take a man to hold down that ranch."

The black-haired girl lifted her head. "Yes. It would, Dusty. Especially seeing as how along with fighting Hod Brann and his crowd he would have me and seven young 'uns and—" she blushed—"probably, a few of our own to feed."

Garrett licked at suddenly dry lips. Nancy was very lovely. She would make some man a good wife. Still dancing, holding her tight to him, he started to speak and realized the music had stopped and the other couples on

the platform were scurrying away from them.

FIGHTING drunk, his gold teeth gleaming in the sun, two big thumbs hooked in crossed gunbelts over the black butts of a pair of business-like looking revolvers, Bill Digby was standing at the top of the stairs.

"You, Garrett," Digby named him. "So you're a bold bad man from Abilene paid to come to Showdown to kill me because I got the guts to root on the far side of the river." He weaved slightly in his drunkenness. "So I'm calling you. Go for your guns."

Garrett felt shamed for the man. Regardless of the outcome of the present incident, Digby wasn't the man to breach the dike Hod Brann and the Association had erected. He hadn't rooted on the far bank. He'd merely settled. A man who couldn't even hold his own wife, a man who had to get a snootful of whiskey to face trouble and even then hadn't been able to stand the strain of waiting for trouble to come to him, was a reed blowing in the wind.

"Well, go for your gun," Digby panted.

Instead, being very careful the movement couldn't be misunderstood, Garrett took his sack of makings from his shirt pocket and built a cigarette, looking at the three men slightly to one side and back of Digby.

Still holding Mrs. Digby's bare elbow, Hod Brann winked at him. Wyatt Hardy and the Kid were primed to shoot as soon as he had. As soon as he had killed Digby.

For the third time Digby said, "Go for your gun, Garrett." Then, unable to stand the strain any longer, his own big hands swooped down to the butts of the guns in his holsters.

The two shots filled the space of a heartbeat. Then while the crowd around the platform stood hushed with awe, Digby stared, incredulous, from his bleeding fingers, to the guns that Garrett had shot out of his hands.

Still holding his unlicked cigarette in his left hand, the muzzle of the gun in his right hand tilted slightly upwards, Garrett said, quietly, "You'd better see a doctor about those hands, fellow. You and I haven't any quarrel. My quarrel is with Wyatt Hardy and Kid Gamble."

Elbowing his way to the front of the crowd, Jack shrilled, "There they are. They're the ones who shot my paw."

"Hush, Jack," Nancy said.

Still without raising his voice, Garrett asked, "How about it, fellows?"

Hardy jerked his head at Gamble. "Now."

Garrett's hat flew from his head. A bullet tugged at the lobe of his left ear. He licked his cigarette, unconcerned. Then he broke his gun, blew the smoke from the barrel, and thumbed in four fresh shells without even bothering to look in the direction in which he had shot. When he did the Kid and Wyatt were sprawled on the platform and Hod Brann had disappeared. It didn't matter. He could send Brann his money by messenger. Or keep it. He'd earned it.

A black-bearded Grand Army man picked up Garrett's hat, and brushed it carefully before handing it to him. "We had you all wrong, Dusty. But great Jehoshaphat! What shooting!"

Garrett dropped his gun back in its holster. "Just for the record. It was self-defense?"

"If I ever seen a clearer case. Them two was primed to kill you."

A dozen men pressed forward then, but Garrett pretended not to see their hands. Perhaps some time. What was done was done. Neither spilled whiskey nor blood could be poured back. But there was always the future.

Locating Jack at the edge of the platform he asked him if he could harness and hitch up the team.

His eyes shining, the boy said, "Yes, sir."

"Then get at it," Garrett said. "And get the wagon ready to load. We're going back to your father's spread and ranch it." He made certain everyone heard him. "That's the former Marsden spread, a little north of here, on the west bank of the river."

An hour later, driving through Showdown, Garrett threaded the lines between his fingers so he could drive with one hand and use his other hand and arm to better purpose. When he had, he asked Nancy if there was a preacher in Gilby.

The black-haired girl moved still closer to him on the seat, her fingers clasped over the hand of the arm around her waist. She sounded slightly breathless. "Well—"

"Yes?" Garrett asked.

Nancy took a deep breath and squeezed his fingers, hard. "Well, all I can say is, there better be."

BRAND OF THE WILD ONES

He piled into Hawkins and
they both fetched up against
the fireplace. . . .



By
**DAMON
KNIGHT**

*Three things caught up with tough
Sam Pace—a fast running iron . . .
a slow-running man . . . and a
brand no man might wear on his
face—and live!*

THIS is peaceful country now, you bet. Not like ten years ago, by a long shot. You see over yonder, where the trail goes up into the hills? Man didn't go in there, in the old days, unless he was spoilin' for a fight.

Old Sam? Sure he went up there, right up till he got so crippled he couldn't get out of his armchair. He was like that when

you knowed him, down in Pecos, wasn't he? Sure. He never changed.

There's a good place to rest the horses, down by those cottonwoods. . . . Well, he did change once, and it was a danged good thing. I told him so to his face, and he never answered me back. Old Sam Pace and me, we always got along pretty good long as I worked for him, even if I am near as stubborn as he is. He knowed I was right, that time. There wasn't a tarnation thing he could say.

Well, I will tell you about it. Likely Sam'll tell you hisself, when we get back to the house, but he kind of skins over parts of it.

First of all, there's Sam's daughter. You'll see her tomorrow, when they come in from town, so there's no use of me tryin' to describe her. I never could anyhow, not much of a hand at that kind of talk.

No, she ain't a bit like Sam, to look at her. Sam's homely as a lizard, always was. She hasn't got his temper, neither. Sam, you know, whenever he wanted something, he'd bull ahead till he got it or bust. Miss Rose just sort of set her teeth and hung on. Difference between stubborn and determined, I reckon.

Well, she met this feller Jim Morris down to Powder Creek whilst she was buyin' supplies, and bought a belt off him. No, he didn't clerk in no haberdashery, he made this here belt. He was a silversmith, worked some in leather too, and he'd made this belt—tooled leather, conchos on it, big silver buckle an' all. The conchos and the buckle had a design on 'em.

Few weeks later she went to town, and brung Jim back with her to supper. And of course old Sam, he looked like a riled bull. Jim was a good-lookin' cuss, big too, and plenty of meat on him. But he didn't have no rope callouses on his hands. He spent his time down in that shop of his, making stuff out of Mex silver.

Sure he was good at it, and doing good too, though he shipped out most of what he sold. Folks around here didn't take to it much, just like Sam; thought it was frippery. Way Sam figured, he was no better than a foreigner, and he wasn't going to have no such person courtin' his daughter.

I figured you'd mention that branding iron. You couldn't miss it, way Sam's got it hung up over the fireplace. But you hold

onto your horses, and I'll get to it directly.

Well, like you'd naturally expect, Miss Rose, she didn't cotton to Sam tellin' her who she couldn't see. But for a while I reckon Sam thought he'd saw the end of it. He figured she wasn't the kind to go doin' things behind his back, and, far as that goes, she wasn't. Things was, she never said she wasn't seein' Jim, and she never said she was. She just went her own way and done it. According to her lights, it was Sam that was in the wrong, not her.

But Sam didn't see it that way when he found out. He happened to get restless one night and go ridin' down by the river, about where we are now, and he come upon Miss Rose and Jim settin' under a tree, talkin'.

Jim he didn't carry a gun, or I expect Sam would of shot him. Like it was, they fought barehanded, and Jim come up under one of Sam's roundhouse swings and knocked him crossways.

Then Jim says—this here is one of the things Sam leaves out of the story—he says, "Pace, you're a bullheaded, tobacco-chewin', ornery old man. But by thunder, you're going to be my father-in-law, and we're both going to learn to like it."

Yes sir, that's what he said.

If I know Sam, he had more respect for Jim after that, but it didn't change him none that I could see. He kept Miss Rose locked in her room of nights for the next two weeks, and I expect he would of kept it up except for the Elmer Hawkins business.

Hawkins was a big barrel-chested ranny that was riding for Sam. He was a wrong one, it turned out, and Sam fired him and kicked him off of the ranch.

You know how it was in them days, with the hill country right over yonder. Sam, he'd built up one of the richest places in the territory, but he had to shoot several fellers that wanted to take his cows while he was at it. This here Hawkins had been cuttin' out calves before branding and puttin' his own mark on 'em. Had quite a herd up in one of them little canyons in the hills. Well, the calf tally wasn't what it oughta been, and Sam smelled around till he got wind of what Hawkins was up to. And then, like I say, he kicked him off of the ranch.

He done a lot of night riding for a couple of weeks in there, trying to find out where Hawkins had the herd, and he couldn't keep much of an eye on Miss Rose. So it seems

she got out to see Jim once or twice, and when Sam got around to noticing her again she wasn't there. Her and Jim had come to an agreement, seemed like. He got a letter from 'em next week, from Kansas City. They was on their honeymoon.

SAY, you notice that there tree? I believe that's the very one that Sam found the two of 'em setting under. And that's where they fought, Sam madder than Tophet, Jim not wanting to fight, but not going to back down, neither. And Miss Rose, I reckon, was standin' up against the tree, watching 'em and wishin' they'd quit.

Well, like you'd figure, Sam was considerable broke up. I don't know whether he was madder or sadder, and I don't believe he knew hisself. I mentioned Miss Rose to him one day, just sayin' I wondered how she was gettin' along, and Sam he took and knocked me into the horse trough.

I was goin' to quit unless I got an apology, but Sam wasn't the kind that would apologize to a feller. I seen him lookin' kind of sad once or twice, so I figured he was sorry and that was near the same as saying so.

So I stayed on, figuring I'd stick until round-up anyhow, and then I'd study some more and see if I figured I'd be better off somewheres else. Miss Rose, she used to calm him down some, you know, and after she went Sam was a hard man to ride for.

Well, of course you know what happened to Sam. Fell off of his horse and got all busted up. That was at round-up, that same year. So after that I couldn't see my way to leave. Had to be somebody to ramrod the place instead of Sam, and I didn't trust none of the other boys with it.

About three weeks later, on a Saturday afternoon, I was coming back from the barn to speak to Sam about something or other, when Miss Rose and Jim Morris come ridin' up to the house.

Seems like they'd been back in town for a spell, but just heard about Sam gettin' throwed, and Miss Rose wasn't going to take no about comin' in to see him. Me, I had my orders, but you wouldn't catch me tryin' to stop Miss Rose from doing something she had her mind set on. I just asked her please to make out like she hadn't met me, and a little while later, I come into the house sort of accidental.

There they was in the settin' room, Sam

in his armchair by the window, with the fireplace betwixt him and them, lookin' mad as seventeen bulls in fly time. Miss Rose settin' up in a straight chair, just like she was to home again, but sort of pale around the jaws. And Jim standing, him not having been asked to set.

Directly he seen me, old Sam says, "Hank, throw that sidewinder off the place."

Miss Rose, she says very calm, "Hank, don't do any such a thing." She says to Sam, "Pa, you're lookin' peaked. I'll fix you some soup before I go."

Well, Sam he liked the girl's cooking real fine. The cook we had was fair to middlin' on eggs and beans, and anything else he made you wouldn't believe it until you seen it. So whatever he was fixin' to say, Sam never said it.

Next thing, he seen Miss Rose pullin' at the string on a long brown paper bundle she had layin' on her lap.

"What's that?" he says, suspicious.

Miss Rose looked down like she hadn't come to notice it till just that minute, and then she said, "Oh," and pulled the wrapping off of it. It was a branding iron, with Sam's Rocking P on the end of it. Only it was silver.

I told you I'd get to this part. Well, Miss Rose says, "It's a present, Pa. We were figuring to wait till your birthday, but we decided it would be fitting to give it to you now." She stood up and handed it over to him.

Sam looked it over, with them eyebrows of his sort of bristling, and he says, not committing hisself, "Silver."

"That's right," says young Jim.

"We thought it would be something nice to hang over the fireplace," says Miss Rose. "Jim made it."

Sam he looked at it again and then he looked up at Jim. "Made it yourself, did you?" he says, kind of interested.

"Yes," says Jim.

"Well," Sam hollers, "this here's what I think of it!" And he heaves it acrost the room.

Jim and Miss Rose, they looked at it, and then Jim says, "Well, that about does it. Come on, Rose."

She got up, lookin' too mad to talk.

Jim says, "Pace, you remember what I called you last time I met you? I take that back. It was an insult to all the bull-headed,

tobacco-chewin', ornery old men in the country. Hell, it was an insult to the bulls," he says. He would of gone on, and a pleasure to hear him, but he got interrupted.

"That there," says a hard voice from the back of the room, "sure is the truth!"

I turned around, and it was that feller Hawkins. He had his gun drawed, and there was a big grin on his face. I reached for my Colt, but he said, "I wouldn't," and I didn't.

It was after the round-up, you see, and Saturday at that. There wasn't but two cowhands besides me on the place, and they was both out riding line.

Hawkins come towards me, walking kind of careful, and he told me to turn around. I done it, and he took my six-gun. Then he must of whanged me over the head.

I COME to about half an hour later. I was roped up and sort of tossed in a corner. Miss Rose and Jim they was tied to chairs facing the fire, and Hawkins was standing on the other side of the fireplace, next to old Sam's armchair. Jim he looked sort of bruised around the eye, but old Sam was worse. He was so beat up you could scarcely tell what kind of expression he had on. But there wasn't much doubt about it when he spoke up.

"Hawkins," he says, "I'll hang you for this."

The fire had burnt down to nothing much, and it was a mite chilly, but there was a big blotch of sweat on the back of Hawkins' shirt. He must of worked up a sweat, I reckon, hittin' old Sam. It looked to me like he was wind of wore out and shaky, even. And there was Sam, lookin' like a side of beef but just as cool as if he was playin' cards with the boys.

Sam was like that—hot-headed as any two fellers has a right to be, except when he was in a real tight. And it struck me right then that Jim, he was the same way. I looked at him, and he looked just like old Sam. Settin' there watchin' and takin' it all in, and waitin' for his chance.

Miss Rose she was pale, and a little later she fainted.

Hawkins says, "I know you got that round-up money somewheres in the house, and I want it." Then he says a couple of things that I wouldn't repeat. Finally he took and hit Sam again. But he seen it

didn't do no good. He looked around him and his eye hit on that silver branding iron. "Pretty fancy," he says.

That was when Miss Rose fainted—when Hawkins picked up the iron and shoved the end of it into the fire.

He didn't say anything. Just grinned, and stood there waitin' for the iron to get hot. He was a wrong one for sure, that Hawkins.

By and by the iron got hotter. I could see the P at the end of it glowin', but Hawkins didn't move to pick it up. He let it set there, gettin' hotter all the time. Every now and then he'd glance at old Sam's cheek, or it might be his forehead, lettin' him know where he reckoned he'd put the brand.

Well, I was sweatin' some myself. A thing like that'd be no better than bein' killed, for old Sam. Man can't let folks see him with the same brand on his face that he puts on his cows. I tried to get out of my ropes, and I couldn't.

Finally Hawkins looked at Sam and he says, "Last chance, Pace."

(Continued on page 114)



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TALES of the

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PYRAMID LAKE MASSACRE

DISCOVERY OF THE FABULOUS COMSTOCK LODGE TOUCHED OFF A WILD STAMPEDE INTO NEVADA WITH MINERS, GAMBLERS, COWHANDS AND HARCASSES POURING IN FROM CALIFORNIA, TEXAS AND THE EAST. THE ONLY LAW WAS THE LAW OF THE GUN.

THE PAIUTES, RUTHLESSLY SHOVED OUT OF THEIR HUNTING GROUNDS BY THIS SWASHBUCKLING HORD OF FORTUNE SEEKERS, MET FOR A COUNCIL OF WAR AT PYRAMID LAKE ON THE UPPER TRUCKEE RIVER IN THE SPRING OF 1860.

A MATCH WAS SET TO THE POWDER KEG WHEN A COUPLE OF HOODLUMS LURED TWO PRETTY INDIAN GIRLS TO A TRADING STATION EAST OF CARSON AND HELD THEM THERE. A WAR PARTY RESCUED THEM, BURNED THE STATION AND KILLED 5 MEN.

A FORCE OF 105 VOLUNTEERS WAS QUICKLY ASSEMBLED AT VIRGINIA CITY UNDER MAJOR Wm. M. ORMSBY TO TEACH THE "RED DEVILS" A LESSON. THIS MOTLEY "ARMY," ON HORSEBACK, MULEBACK AND AFOOT, PROCEEDED UP THE TRUCKEE ON MAY 12 TH IN SEARCH OF THE PAIUTES UNDER CHIEF YOUNG WINNEMUCCA.

EMERGING FROM A GORGE INTO A MEADOW DOTTED WITH COTTONWOODS AND BUSHES NEAR PYRAMID LAKE, THEY SPOTTED INDIANS ON A RIDGE AHEAD. THE RIDERS CHARGED, THE REST FOLLOWING ON THE RUN. BUT WHEN THEY TOPPED THE RISE, THE REDSKINS HAD FLED TO ANOTHER. AGAIN THEY CHARGED AND AGAIN THERE WERE NO PAIUTES.



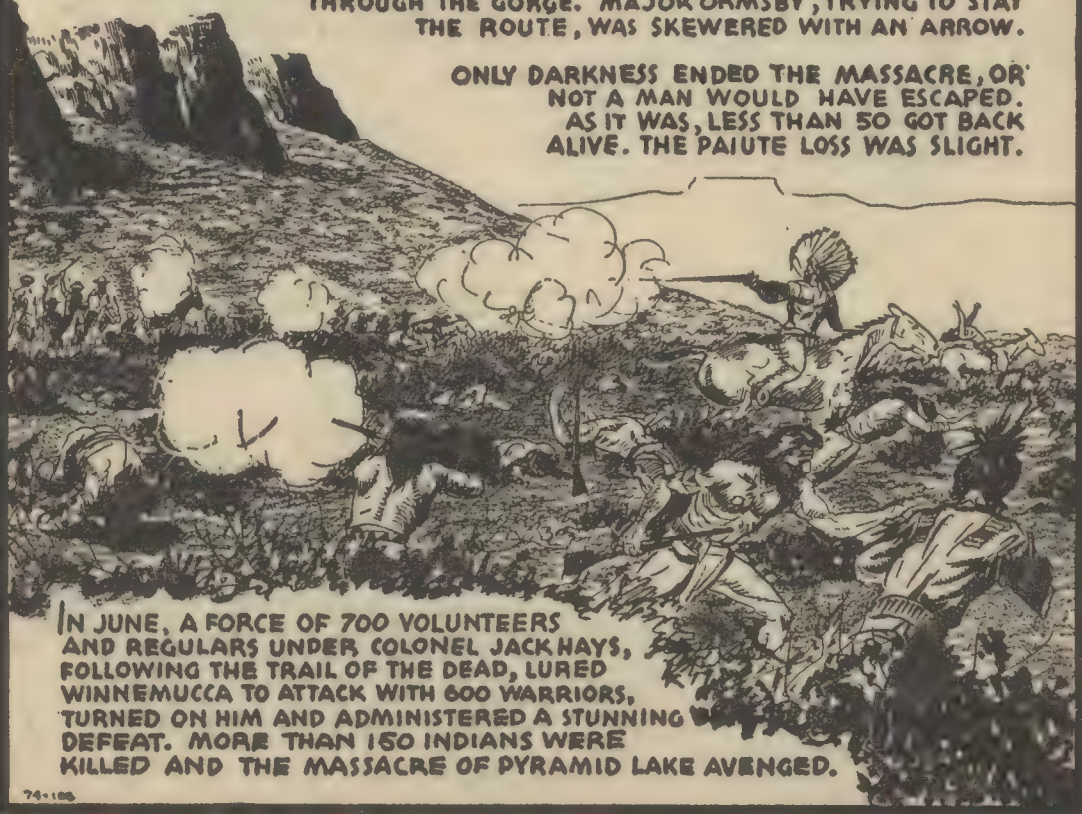
— OLD WEST —



THE ARMY WAS STRUNG OUT ACROSS THE MEADOW WHEN SUDDENLY FROM EVERY BIT OF COVER CAME A HAIL OF ARROWS AND BULLETS THAT THREW THEM INTO CONFUSION. WILY WINNEMUCCA HAD LED THEM INTO A TRAP AND SURROUNDED THEM.

THOSE WHO TRIED TO MAKE A STAND WERE PICKED OFF. THE REST, UNABLE TO COME TO GRIPS WITH AN ENEMY, RETREATED. THEN THE INDIANS CAME WHOOPING OUT TO FALL UPON THE STRAGGLERS, PULL HORSEMEN FROM SADDLES, TOSS STRUGGLING MEN INTO THE RIVER BELOW AS THEY FLED THROUGH THE GORGE. MAJOR ORMSBY, TRYING TO STAY THE ROUTE, WAS SKEWERED WITH AN ARROW.

ONLY DARKNESS ENDED THE MASSACRE, OR NOT A MAN WOULD HAVE ESCAPED. AS IT WAS, LESS THAN 50 GOT BACK ALIVE. THE PAIUTE LOSS WAS SLIGHT.



IN JUNE, A FORCE OF 700 VOLUNTEERS AND REGULARS UNDER COLONEL JACK HAYS, FOLLOWING THE TRAIL OF THE DEAD, LURED WINNEMUCCA TO ATTACK WITH 600 WARRIORS, TURNED ON HIM AND ADMINISTERED A STUNNING DEFEAT. MORE THAN 150 INDIANS WERE KILLED AND THE MASSACRE OF PYRAMID LAKE AVENGED.



"He went for his gun and I beat
him to the draw. . . ."

**By CLIFF
FARRELL**

*"Easy-livin' an' quick-killin'," was what men said of Clay Thorne
—but dying, he found, came hard!*

LAST GUN TO OGALLALA

THE SHOOTING took place at red dawn while the riders were roping out the first of their day horses from the remuda the wrangler had hazed into the temporary corral at the crew wagon.

Two shots were fired, but the reports were so faint at that distance; and Linda Brush and the other women were so preoccupied in breaking camp, that they did not give the sounds a second thought at the moment.

The women and children were traveling in three canvas-topped prairie wagons that were loaded to the hilts with furniture and baggage. They always camped a mile or more upwind and away from the herd for safety's sake in case of a stampede.

It wasn't until they noticed that the cattle were not being thrown on the trail that the women realized something serious had happened. The men were still dismounted there in the distance and gathered in a tight circle.

With a chill of apprehension Linda now recalled those two distant reports. The same thought must have hit the other women also, for Linda saw that they were suddenly frightened too, but trying not to show it. All of them had husbands or other close kinfolk in the riding crew.

Linda mechanically finished scouring a dutch oven with clean white creek sand. She rinsed it, dried it over the last coals of the breakfast fire and packed it in its exact place in the jockey box in the wagon. All the time she was watching the cowboys.

Something like this has been building up for a long time, she reflected.

It was the eighth week of the drive from Texas. Chain brand, which Linda's father owned, was moving, lock, stock and barrel, from its birthplace on the Brazos River to new northern range in far and strange Montana where the grass was said to be greener, and free of barbed wire and settlers' furrows.

Two Chain herds had gone up the trail already and Linda's father was in Montana locating the stock and setting up his line

and drift camps. This third and final gather was the cleanup. There were some thirty-five hundred head of mixed stuff in this last herd. And the women and children were going with the final Chain drive, taking with them such belongings as they thought were worth the trouble of packing fifteen hundred miles by wagon.

They had fought rain and mud and cold for the first month up through Texas and across the Indian Nations as far as Dodge. But lately it had been heat—heat and an all-pervading dust that was in their food and in their dreams. Dust and the everlasting mewling of the cattle. A thousand miles of it at the exasperating gait a cow travels. Nerves lately had been stretched thin and taut.

The sun tipped the rim of the plains as the women, the wagons loaded, stood waiting and watching the men in the distance. Linda felt its hot hostile impact on her cheek. The high swells of the plains to the north and the dry bluffs westward, and even the bunchgrass at her feet were bathed in a brassy hot glow. She heard the far, sighing lament of the cattle as they braced themselves to face a new day of blazing heat.

Then Cass Overmire's blocky figure detached itself from the group of men in the distance. Cass was segundo, or second in command of Chain, and he was ramrodding this drive. Cass mounted his horse and headed slowly toward the women's wagons.

As he pulled up before them it was plain he had no liking for this duty. Weathered to a grained mahogany hue, Cass Overmire was gray and bleak with the responsibility of forty humans and a fortune in livestock.

He remained in the saddle, where he felt more sure of himself. "We'll be hung up a while," he announced tersely. "Had an accident at the wagon. One of the riders, Arch Wyatt, was—uh—hurt. Fact is, he's dead."

Linda felt a twinge of horror, but greater than that was the accompanying sense of

thankfulness. It was a selfish emotion, and she admitted it, but she knew also the other women felt the same. For Arch Wyatt was little more than a name to any of them. He had hired out with the drive at Dodge to fill a vacancy. Linda recalled him as a loose-mouthed, rather overbearing man of about thirty with eyes a trifle bold where the women were concerned.

Cass Overmire addressed Aunt Mary Halsted, oldest of the women. "We'll need a canvas tarp sewed as a shroud," he said. "We'll give him as Christian a burial as possible."

He wheeled his horse to leave, but Aunt Mary halted him sharply. "We ain't children, Cass Overmire, an' don't like being treated as such. Arch Wyatt's death was no accident. We heard gunshots. It takes two to make a fight. We'll learn the truth anyway. Who was the other man?"

Cass debated that with himself for a moment. Finally he said, "Clay Thorne. It was self-defense. We all agreed on that . . . even the one or two that was friendly with Arch Wyatt. We cleared Clay completely."

Cass glanced briefly at Linda, a question in his sun-faded eyes. Aunt Mary moved to her side and patted her comfortingly on the shoulder.

"If a man's born to be wild he's goin' to be wild, an' it's best to know it before it's too late," Aunt Mary said.

Linda's cheeks were pale in the growing heat of the sun. "You're not being fair," she said. "Cass said he fired in self-defense."

"That's the way they all start," Cass remarked. "At first they're just wild kids, packin' a gun to show off. Then they get a taste of blood—"

LINDA swung around abruptly, and walked past a wagon out of sight of everyone. She stared unseeingly at the vastness of the plains southward. A graceful, tawny-haired young woman of twenty-two, she had warm gray eyes, and the sun and weather had only succeeded in tanning her skin a golden hue. There was a strength of character in her face, and an equal strength in her figure.

Her mother had died when she was ten. As an only child she had taken over the household management and the social obligations at the big Chain headquarters. She

had learned to make her own decisions and to judge people on their merits rather than their own appraisal.

Until lately she had never been in love and therefore had never been engaged, for, with a person of her honest convictions those two experiences were synonymous.

Other women had considered her too choosy. Many men had courted her, and some had been literally thrown at her head by mothers anxious to marry their sons to the comely heiress to Chain, but none had aroused any interest in her until the drifting cowboy, Clay Thorne, had appeared on the scene.

Clay Thorne rode into her view now. He had mounted and left the crew wagon and was letting his horse carry him aimlessly. The horse was naturally heading for the herd which was spread loosely over the flats and along the treeless plains stream. Horns gleamed hotly in the increasing sun-glare.

Clay was a lonely figure in that sanguine light. He rode erect and taut in the saddle, but looking straight ahead with the unseeing gaze of a man at conflict with himself.

What, Linda asked herself, does a man think about who has just killed? What is the extent of his remorse, and his pledge for the future? Clay had passed through the greatest crisis a human can face and that it would change him she knew.

He finally turned his head and singled out her figure against the wagons at that distance. He hesitated, then kneeed his horse around and rode slowly toward her. That brought a rush of hope surging through her.

She walked away from the wagons to meet him, for she knew the other women were staring, eaten by curiosity, and wishing they could listen in on what was to be said.

Clay dismounted, trying to be casual, but she saw the pull of tension in his movements. He had the supple-waisted, flat-shouldered carriage of a horseman, and his face was blunt-cut beneath thick dark hair and straight dark brows.

He wore his scarred brush jacket, weather-limp hat and foxed breeches with the jaunty flair that was the attribute of youth. He was a year older than Linda in time, but she always was aware of a vast maturity in herself when she stood beside him.

His straight lips were without color, but he forced them into the frame of a smile.

That brought a sudden dread in Linda. That hollow, manufactured smile was the bravado of his carefree youth to which he was still desperately trying to cling.

She almost resented the fierceness of her apprehension for him. And she marveled at it too, astounded that a man she had known only a few weeks could mean so much. Clay had joined the drive along the trail just as Arch Wyatt had joined it. Wyatt had been only a vague name to her, but Clay Thorne had come to mean everything.

"I reckon you know what happened?" Clay asked slowly.

Linda nodded. "Cass told us."

"I had to fight or crawl," Clay said. "He's been crowdin' me for quite a spell. He was the kind that likes to haze people he thinks are scared of him. He was a mean-natured man. Today he put his rope on the best horse in my string an' tried to claim it as one of his. I couldn't stand for that. A rider takes pride in his own saddlestrung. It ended up in me punchin' him in the nose. Then he went for his gun."

Clay let it rest there for a moment. Finally he concluded, "I beat him to the draw."

Again the dread was an icy weight in Linda. He had said that with the terse pride of a man who has suddenly realized his own deadly capabilities.

Linda's glance dropped briefly to the black-handled six-shooter he carried in a worn holster on his thigh. Older trail men, like Cass Overmire, seldom carried firearms because of the inconvenience of their weight while on duty. But gun-packing had been, until now, a part of the lingering show-off spirit of Clay's youth.

"Don't carry a gun again, Clay," Linda exclaimed suddenly. "Leave it at the wagon like Cass does. Guns breed trouble. Killings breed killings."

He didn't understand. He moved closer, and would have kissed her. "I can take care of myself," he said positively.

He had never kissed her in public, but that was not the reason Linda held him away now. She stood so taut he abruptly dropped his hands from her arms.

"You can't take care of yourself with a gun, Clay," she said insistently.

He stared, hurt. Then he turned and swung astride his horse. "I stand up for my rights like a man ought to," he said, "an' you act like I'm headed straight for hell. I

figured the girl I hope to marry would try to look at things from my viewpoint."

He touched spurs to his horse and rode at a rigid gallop toward the herd.

LINDA walked back to the wagons. She was dry-eyed now, but the expression on her face caused Aunt Mary to sigh with sympathy. Aunt Mary had never approved of Clay Thorne. Nor had Cass Overmire. Aunt Mary had said more than once that she wished Linda's father was within reach so he could be told what was going on.

"No use workin' yourself up about something that can't be helped," Aunt Mary said. "No amount of frettin' on a woman's part will change things like that anyway. He's young and reckless, but even he's got more sense than to go to Ogallala and stand up to a man like Sid Wyatt."

Linda turned, startled. "Sid Wyatt? What does he have to do with this?"

"My land!" Aunt Mary exclaimed, flustered. "I figured Clay had told you that Arch Wyatt an' Sid Wyatt was brothers."

"Are you sure of that?" Linda asked.

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Her voice was small, shaking with emotion. "I'm sure," Mary said. "Leastwise Cass just told me that he knew both the Wyatts from boyhood."

Linda had heard of Sid Wyatt since childhood. The man was a gambler, a gunman and a killer, so notorious that his name was a household word throughout the West. The same era that had created Billy the Kid, Ben Thompson and King Fisher had created Sid Wyatt.

Linda looked at Aunt Mary. "Clay doesn't know Arch Wyatt was the brother of that other one. I'm sure he doesn't, or he would have mentioned it."

"My goodness, maybe he doesn't at that," Aunt Mary said. "I guess Cass Overmire is the only person in the outfit that knew it. Well, Cass will soon tell Clay what he's done. He'll warn Clay not to show his face in Ogallala."

"Are you sure Sid Wyatt is in Ogallala?"

"That's what Cass says. And it won't be long before he knows about Arch Wyatt's death. There are riders passin' by every day goin' to an' from Ogallala. Such news can't be kept quiet."

"Clay won't face Sid Wyatt, of course," Linda said. "Why should he?"

"He won't if he's got a lick of sense," Aunt Mary agreed. "He might have come out best in that trouble with Arch Wyatt, but he's a dead man if he tries to stand up to the other one. An' Sid Wyatt will shoot him on sight just to uphold his reputation as a bad man. Clay better head back for Texas, an' he better cover his tracks until he's safe."

The first stirring of the day's hot wind plucked at Linda's hair, and she again heard the lament of the cattle. She was thinking that Ogallala, the new trail town on the South Platte River, was only a few day's drive ahead.

He's got to go back to Texas, or to California, she was telling herself. And that meant she would probably never see him again.

Cass Overmire came riding back to the wagons. "We're ready," he said. "The grave is in the best spot we could find. Fetch the Bible, Mary, an' select a chapter. I'll do the readin'."

He looked at Linda. "It wouldn't do no harm if you sang a hymn, Linda."

Linda straightened, suddenly bitter at this

Arch Wyatt whose death was tearing her life apart. "Why should I?" she demanded. "Does he deserve a hymn?"

Cass stood looking at her without expression. Aunt Mary was shocked. Then the bitterness went out of Linda, and only resignation remained.

"I'll sing," she said.

"Lamb of the Redeemer," was what she sang. It was a cradle hymn she had learned from her mother.

The cowboys stood with bared heads, and the women held their scarfs and shawls tight about their hair as the parched wind whipped at their skirts and blew powder-dry dust from the mound of red earth beside the open grave.

The heat of the sun was an unbearable weight upon them.

As Cass was reading from the Bible in a halting, stilted singsong, Linda saw Clay Thorne ride to the crest of a swell in the distance, and pull up, watching the cluster of humans there at the grave. Then he turned and rode slowly below the skyline again and back to the herd.

"Dust to dust," Cass intoned. His balding, sunweathered head was shiny as bronze in the sun. Then he stepped back, and presently the riders got busy with the shovels. The grave was filled, and marked.

Within another quarter of an hour the riders were shoving the cattle off graze and into motion. Rope ends snapped, cattle bawled, and the shrill yipping of the riders arose as they stirred the laggards into action.

Soon the drive was strung out in its two-mile snakey length, with a thin, high-riding haze of dust marking its might from point to drag. Arch Wyatt's grave, fell slowly astern.

The horse-drawn wagons, carrying the women, forged slowly abreast and then ahead of the drive. Linda rode in the first wagon, occasionally spelling the swamper at the reins.

She saw that Clay was riding swing, where he flanked the column of cattle. Even at that mile distance Linda was aware of a grimness in him and a loneliness and a sense of isolation. He sat taut and thoughtful in the saddle.

He knows now about Sid Wyatt, she reflected. He knows he is a dead man if he goes to Ogallala. Cass has told him:

AT MID-AFTERNOON Linda could stand the suspense no longer. She signaled the day wrangler, and he brought up the remuda, cut out her steeldust mare and rigged it with her sidesaddle.

She mounted and rode back to the herd which had fallen two miles astern of the wagons. She passed Cass Overmire who was riding right point. Cass swung his horse around as though of a mind to stop her. Then he thought better of it.

She loped down the flank of the drive. To the west the tops of massive thunderheads were peering over the horizon, and she saw Cass scanning them with frowning thoughtfulness.

Clay was still riding swing. Dust had drifted the creases of his shirt and hat, and powdered his eyebrows. He had settled now into the hipshot slackness of weariness, riding slope-shouldered with hands crossed on the saddlehorn, his eyes unseeingly on the ground.

He straightened when he saw her. The way his face lighted brought a sudden blinding mist of tears to her eyes, and she had to turn away, pretending it was dust that was causing the trouble.

"Hello, dear," she said.

She pulled alongside him, reached out and pressed his hand. Without speaking they rode for a time at the slow, bobbling gait their horses adopted to stay abreast of the shambling cattle.

"You know about Sid Wyatt?" Linda finally asked.

"Yes. Cass told me."

A whiteface cow began drifting wide of the marching column, maneuvering for a chance to break and run. Clay's horse pricked its ears. Clay shook a rope-end warningly, and the cow gave up the attempt to spook, and went lumbering back into line.

Linda waited. Finally Clay said, "Looks like I augged myself some real trouble, don't it?"

"Surely Sid Wyatt won't carry this thing any further."

"He will, though," Clay shrugged. "He comes from a feud-fightin' family."

"You don't have to go to Ogallala," she said.

"That's for sure," Clay nodded. "At least there's nobody draggin' me there on a rope, now is there?"

"Nobody would blame you," Linda in-

sisted. "Sid Wyatt is a professional gunman. All this will blow over if you avoid meeting him."

"I reckon it would if I kept out of his way for a long time," Clay said thoughtfully. "For years."

"Promise me you won't go to Ogallala," she burst out.

He looked at her. "Now there's an easy way out for me," he mused. "I could say I turned yella to please you."

She realized she had made a serious mistake. "I only mean that it's so useless for men who have never even laid eyes on each other to—to fight each other."

"It does seem that way," he agreed.

She saw the grayness of spirit and the indecision in him. An unnerving doubt of himself. The newborn belief in his own fighting ability was shaken already.

She kissed him. She tried to think of something final and convincing that would sway him and yet leave him with a semblance of his old jaunty pride. Her yearning to convince him that he must stay alive was an agony within her, but it was a decision he would never let her make for him.

She stayed with him all afternoon until, far ahead, Cass Overmire located the stopping point, and the point riders began to turn the herd off the trail. It was a dry camp on the open plains, for next water was still half a day's drive ahead.

The sun was sinking into thunderheads that now were growing black and menacing and crowding the sky. Cass sighed and said, "Double-lash all wagon sheets, an' every man better keep his night horse cinched up tight an' close at hand. That storm is comin' fast an' it's goin' to be a buster by the looks. The only bad run we had was durin' a thunderstorm in the Nations."

He ordered the wagons to the crest of a low sandhill a mile west of the bedground and doubled the riders on the early cock-tail shift with the herd.

The women hurried the evening meal and finished the last chores with nervous speed as hot darkness descended. Wagon sheets were lashed tight, and the small children put to bed.

Linda walked clear of the wagons. The instant she turned her back on the glow of the chip fires, the night beyond was utterly black, utterly lifeless and suffocatingly hot.

A pale flicker of lightning far to the west

gave a momentary, frightening glimpse of boiling clouds. Then the blackness clapped down again.

The voices of the riders, singing to the cattle, came faintly, the sounds sweetened by distance. Evidently every man was on duty now, and she tried to single out Clay's voice from the many that drifted in the night, but she could not be sure. But always she could hear the stirring and the nervous moaning of the cattle.

The weird St. Elmo's fire appeared. Every horn tip in the herd showed a tiny fleck of cold light. It was strange, frightening.

That faded, and a gust of the humid wind brought to her the feverish-hot, animal smell of the cattle.

Then jagged lightning split the blackness. The vastness of the plains, and the wildness of the herd, and what was about to happen was revealed in steel-sharp detail to Linda.

The thunderclap came, deafeningly, and when its uproar faded she heard the lower, steadier rumble of the cattle running. They had stampeded with the lightning flash.

Lightning blazed again and she saw the stampede as a soiled brown flood that was creeping toward the wagons. She glimpsed the doll-like figures of horsemen.

Then the rain came in great, translucent ropes of water that glowed in the lightning display. And the thunder shook the earth... thunder and the oncoming rumble of the stampede.

Linda was drenched to the skin, her hair falling in wet coils over her shoulders. She put her hands to her ears and stood there moaning and swaying in terror and pity for the humans who were down there riding amid that turmoil and danger.

THE stampede bore steadily upon the sandhill where the wagons stood, but at least one rider was risking his life to stay at the point of the running mass of cattle, for Linda glimpsed him in the lightning flashes occasionally and she could see the flash of a six-shooter at times.

It was Clay. She saw him clearly in a blaze of light. And he succeeded in veering the leaders so that the running cattle were deflected from the rising ground, and away from the wagons.

The boom of hoofs went on and on, endlessly, and then it faded off into the storm, and presently only the roar of rain and the

thunder remained, and all the women could do now was to pray that their men would not be buried in some coulee or buffalo wallow beneath falling tons of dying animals.

The lightning and thunder weakened, and soon the storm rolled on eastward. The stars came out, and Linda realized she was chilled to the marrow, for the temperature had plunged thirty degrees.

It was after daybreak when the first rider came in, bringing brief word that everyone was alive, though one rider was badly injured.

It was noon the following day before Linda saw Clay again. By that time the herd was being reassembled and tallied. She kissed him and held him fiercely.

Then she drew away and buried her face in her hands and wept, for she saw that he had made his decision. He had matched himself against death twice now—once in the duel with Arch Wyatt, and again in the stampede—and he was sure of himself now, and he was going to Ogallala.

He saw that she realized, and nodded. "It's got to be that way, Linda. I can't back down before a man I've never seen. Did you know that he has sent word that he will kill me on sight? A rider from Ogallala brought the warning yesterday."

Linda moaned, "Clay, Clay!"

Cass Overmire came up and led her away. "Clay's got it tough enough without you showin' how hard it'll be on you," he said. "It ain't death that scares a man. It's the grief it brings to them that love him that turns his blood to milk."

They reached the shallow, wide Platte at sundown the next day, and across the river stood the straggling rooftops and false fronts of Ogallala.

Clay did not come to the wagon to see Linda. She knew he did not trust himself that far.

The moment the drive was safely on bed-ground he turned his horse and rode down to the river. Picking his way through the shallows, he headed toward the town.

Cass Overmire and two more Chain riders, carrying sideguns and rifles, followed him, keeping at their distance, but bringing with them their assurance he would not be ambushed.

Linda watched Clay's figure dwindle into the twilight, watched until he rode out of

(Continued on page 111)

CATTLE COUNTRY QUIZ



By **HALLACK McCORD**

(Answers on page 84)

HOWDY pardner! By real Western standards are you cowpoke, or churn-twister? Anyhow, here's your chance to tell. Below are twenty questions on rangeland and cowpoke subjects. If you can answer eighteen or more of them correctly, you're a puncher, there's no doubt. Answer sixteen or seventeen and you're still good. But answer fourteen or fewer, and you're crowding into the churn-twister class.

1. True or false? The old-time Western term "to long-ear" means to place a silk handkerchief on the ground so that sound will be magnified when a listener places his ear against it.

2. What does the real Westerner use the term "long trail" in reference to?

3. In the slangage of the cowpoke, what is a "mesa?"

4. True or false? The term "mesquite" refers to a region covered with mesquite.

5. If the ranch boss sent you out for a "navvy," which of the following items should you return with? A sailor? A type of boat? A Navaho indian pony?

6. True or false? The well know Western term, "mustang" comes from the Spanish word, *mesteño*.

7. True or false? The cowpoke sometimes uses the term "paddle" in reference to the gait of a horse.

8. An "over-slope" is a type of: Earmark? Brand? Ranch house? Boot heel?

9. If the ranch boss sent you out for a "piggin' string," which of the following items should you return with: A short piece of rope used for hog-tying? A leash used to lead small farm animals? A type of rope used only by Apache indians?

10. "Piket" is the cowpoke term for which of the following animals? Dog? Panther? Skunk?

11. If a tenderfoot were sent to gather some "prairie wool," which of the following things should he obtain? Grass? Old sheeps wool? Snake skins?

12. What is the meaning of the term "to bring potluck?"

13. True or false? The word "race" refers to a type of blaze on the forehead of a horse.

14. What sort of country is generally referred to as the range?

15. True or false? In the West, the term "rib up" means to teese or annoy.

16. True or false? "Riding safe" means that one rides with legs tightly pressed against the horse, sits close in the saddle, etc.

17. If a Western badman were said to have "rolled his tail," what would you think he had done?

18. True or false? A "romal" is a whip found on the bridal reins where they are fastened together.

19. What is a running mount?

20. Is the word "sabinas" one that is likely to be used in connection with cattle?

I'LL DIG

By KENNETH FOWLER

"It takes two to make a fight, mister—a thousand dollars to make a killing—and my gun to make it yours!"

EMORY JOHNS flushed under his deep-layered tan as Sara Kelsey stood watching him work on the plate of crusty baked beans she had just placed before him.

"I declare, Emory," she said, folding dish-water-reddened hands across the crisp expanse of apron shielding her matronly waistline, "you've really grown up from the sprout of a boy I remember you. I do believe you're gonna be as tall as your—"

She checked herself suddenly, and with a half-guilty abruptness her glance swung to me.

"You like a cup of coffee, Ben?"

"I wouldn't mind, Sara. Whenever Emory's ready for his'n."

"Well, why didn't you say so? I'll fetch in the pot." And with a sudden brusque air she swung around and went waddling out to the kitchen.

I was Will Kelsey's deputy, and if Sara Kelsey had her way—which she would—I would soon be stepping into his shoes as sheriff. I could also be stepping into a hornets' nest, if I was reading the sign right in this Luther Johns' case.

I knew, of course, what was on Sara's mind. In the week Emory'd been staying at the Kelsey place she'd gotten to like the boy, and I think she was figuring he'd be about right for Amy, her niece, if things took their natural course. But she was worried what Emory might do if Will and I didn't scratch up some kind of a clue, before too many days, that would set us on the trail to the man who had murdered his father.

Emory wasn't much of a hand to talk, and there was something unnatural about the way he'd held his grief in. Even at the burying over at the little cemetery on Watch Rock Hill, he hadn't shed a tear. Just had stood there, his face like a chunk of granite,

while the Reverend Newbauer had spoken the last words. Then he'd turned away, without a word to anybody.

"Well, if it ain't a treat to see you eat, Emory!" Sara Kelsey was back in the room, a big chuck-wagon size coffeepot gripped in her pudgy fingers. "I wish Will'd get back. I can't imagine what's keepin' them two."

Emory looked up. "I reckon the sheriff's a busy man, Miz Kelsey."

"Praise be, he won't be busy at that job much longer!" Sara Kelsey looked at me, her mouth compressed grimly. "Ben Short, here, can have the headaches, after next month."

"If Will's willing," I muttered, but she didn't seem to hear me.

I slouched back in my chair to watch Emory eat and started building a cigarette. And thought of Amy Pender. Sara and Will Kelsey had never had a child of their own, but they'd had Amy with them since she was two, and now she was more like a daughter to them than a niece. Lately, though, I'd noticed that Amy had seemed a mite restless. Especially since Courtney Pender had returned to Desert Forge.

At the thought of Court, I found myself tightening up inside. In all the years Amy had been living here with Will and Sara Kelsey, I don't guess Court had been to see his daughter more than a half dozen times. A week had usually been Court's limit for standing picketed in Desert Forge. Then there'd be a new gold rush or land boom some place and he'd be off, and they wouldn't hear from him again for a year, two years. Court never wrote, and never talked much about his rambles. Or hadn't, until this last trip home. Then he'd bragged of making a killing in Virginia City mine shares, and for once in his life had seemed unusually well supplied with cash.

A GRAVE

A figure hurtled at him across the desk like a shadowy catapult. . . .



I thought of that, and felt an odd uneasiness suddenly. It didn't seem plausible, Court with money to spend, after all those years of unprofitable chasing around. But who knew but what Court had just cut that story out of the whole cloth, to impress Amy?

I lit my cigarette and pinched my eyes against the first puff of smoke, staring at Emory.

"You figure to rehire with Deke Budlong's outfit, Em?" I put out casually.

Emory gave me a quick, studying look. "That'd depend," he answered cautiously. "I—"

Sara Kelsey's voice cut him off. "Go back to work for that old miser? You'd be a fool, Emory Johns!" She came bouncing out of the kitchen doorway carrying the pie.

"It does seem a pity, Emory," she wheezed, "that you never took a notion to the livery business, even with Ed Wilse to put up with. I ain't denyin' he's drunk a lot and likes a high stake poker game—"

A rattle of buckboard wheels interrupted her. "Well, it's about time!"

WILL KELSEY was first into the house, a potato sack of provisions slung over his bony shoulder. He went through to the kitchen, then came back into the dining room and slumped into a chair.

"Hot out," he grumbled. "Like to've melted to a grease spot in Desert Forge."

Amy's voice, gay and lilting, ran past Emory to Sara. "Ma, I can't wait till you see my new dress! We met dad in town, and he practically bought out Henebry's for me."

"Your wonderful pa," I heard Sara mutter, under her breath.

At that moment, a vague uneasiness stirred through me again, and I had a sudden shocked awareness that the feeling stemmed from words I had just heard uttered by Amy Pender. *We met dad in town. . . . he practically bought out Henebry's for me.*

Court Pender, the ne'er-do-well, always broke and down and out. And now his pockets were filled with cash. I felt a lunge of excitement, felt my thoughts start churning like water in a mill race. We had one sure, definite clue in the murder of Luther Johns. The motive had been robbery. And it was just one day after Luther Johns had been ambushed that Courtney Pender had turned up in Desert Forge!

Will was talking to Emory as I walked back into the dining room.

"Ain't an awful lot I could turn up, Emory," Will was saying. "I run into Homer Chase, from Buckhorn, and had another palaver with him. He's the one heard the shot and later seen this tall, dark-haired jigadee high-tailin' it out of the North Butte canyon. Feller was slopin' along too fast for Homer to catch a real good look at him, but he 'peared to be kind of on the skinny side, and wore dude clothes."

"Homer the one found that wallet Ed Wilse'd reported stolen?" asked Emory.

"We figure the wallet dropped out of the thief's pocket," he answered, "while he was hid out up there in the rocks, waitin' for Luther. Don't know if you remember, but Luther'd got to the livery early that morning and left a note for Ed, explainin' he was makin' his regular quarterly trip to the bank, over at Walapi City."

Will Kelsey paused, glancing nervously again at Sara. "Well," he went on reluctantly, "the thief must have hit there a few minutes later, and that's all he found—Ed's wallet, lyin' under some papers on the office desk, and Luther's note. He picked up the wallet, but the note was the important thing. He likely took that old wood road short cut out to the canyon, so I cal'late he wasn't no stranger to these parts. Circled around, then set up his ambush in them rocks, up over the stage road."

"I aim to find out who killed him," Emory said at last. His eyes were cold, bitter. "And no never-minds how long it takes," he added flatly. "I'm ridin' to town tonight."

Emory's back was to Sara Kelsey, but I'd been watching her there in the doorway. And now, like an actor responding to a cue, she shot abruptly into the room.

"Well I declare, Will, if you didn't have your head buttoned on. . . . You forgot my nutmeg!" she blurted out fretfully.

Will Kelsey stared at her with a look of blank surprise. "Nutmeg? Why, no. I brought you—"

"You didn't," Sara Kelsey cut him off fiercely. Her quick brown eyes darted to Emory, who was rising from the table. "Emory, I heard you say you were ridin' to town. Would you mind fetchin' me in a tin of nutmeg? I'll hold supper till you get back."

"Why, I hadn't aimed to be back for supper. I figured I'd look around in town—then—then maybe I'd—"

"Well, of course, if you're busy," interrupted Sara Kelsey.

Emory swallowed. "Why, I didn't mean for you to take it that way, Miz Kelsey. I'll fetch in the nutmeg—some way. I'll go saddle up, now," and with a sheepish look at Will and me, he swung around and went to the door.

WILL and Sara waited until his footsteps had faded on the outside veranda. They exchanged curt, accusing glances, then checked themselves.

A door had banged somewhere in the side of the house, and next Amy Pender was stepping buoyantly into the room.

Standing in front of Sara Kelsey, she lifted her arms like a dancer and pivoted lightly on the balls of her feet.

"How does it fit, ma?"

"Like you'd gotten into it with a shoe-horn." Sara Kelsey cocked back her head and clucked approvingly. "I declare, Amy, if you don't 'mind me of the bride's picture I seen in the last Monkey-Ward's catalogue!"

Blushing, Amy whirled and swooped, kissing Will's wife with impulsive affection. "I suppose I could wear it at the barn-raising stomp the Holsapple's are giving next week. That is—" She stopped, her soft eyes going suddenly blank. "Where's Emory?"

"Gone to town," Sara answered shortly. "He'll be back."

Amy Pender couldn't quite conceal the disappointment that briefly clouded her eyes. "Oh!" Her voice became a little dull, suddenly. "Well, I might as well take this off, now. I wouldn't want it to get—mussed—" Her voice trailed as she swung around and started back for her room.

Sara Kelsey waited until she was out of earshot then guardedly lowered her voice.

"Will, she wanted him to be here, to see that dress."

Will Kelsey removed the pipe from his stubbornly clamped teeth. "Happens sudden, with some. Did with us."

"Will, suppose—suppose Emory got some crazy notion that—that Court—"

"Cross that bridge when we come to it," he growled. "Court claimed he got his money in a mine deal. Meantime, throw an extry bean in the pot for Ben, here. He'll be stayin' for supper."

I shuttled an uneasy glance between them.

"I kind of figured to sashay into town, Will. It wouldn't do any hurt to keep an eye on the boy."

Will Kelsey grunted. "Might do a lot of hurt if he took a notion you was spyin' on him. If Emory's anything like his father, he won't go off half-cocked. Let things ride awhile."

I DRANK coffee and smoked cigarettes in the dining room, while Will worked out in the woodshed, chopping up a supply of stove wood, and Sara buzzed around in the kitchen, getting things ready for supper. I could hear Amy in the front parlor, sweeping. I was the only drone in the place. Not that I wanted to be. It was forced on me.

I kept thinking about Will and Sara, and Emory and Amy. And of how all their lives

could be altered, and maybe ruined, by a worthless scamp like Courtney Pender.

Of course, if it should turn out that Court was our man, Will could always put in his resignation beforehand, and leave it to me to do the dirty work. But that wouldn't be like Will Kelsey. And it wouldn't change the fact that Court was Sara's brother, and the father of the girl who, for all I knew, had set her cap for Emory Johns.

There was another angle that worried me. Will telling Sara that Emory wouldn't go off "half-cocked" was one thing. Will actually believing that, himself, was another. Emory seemed like a quiet, level-headed lad. But suppose, in town, he stumbled onto some lead that Will and I had missed? And then, with the hot impatience of youth, decided not to wait for the slow-grinding wheels of the law?

I worried this thought like a dog with a bone, only vaguely conscious of Amy going past me towards the kitchen.

"Anything I can do, ma?"

"You could tell Will to jiggle his stumps and git washed for supper," I heard Sara tell her. "It don't look as if Emory—"

At that instant a horse nickered outside, and moving across to the window, I saw Emory riding in, and heading up towards the corral.

"Why, here's Emory now!" I heard Sara exclaim. "You run along and smarten up, Amy. I'll set the table."

After a couple minutes I saw Emory heading down from the corral, making towards the pump outside the woodshed. At the same moment, glancing in through the kitchen doorway, I saw Sara Kelsey with her ear bent to the passageway leading from the kitchen to the woodshed. Pricked by curiosity, I got up and moved closer to the kitchen. Then I heard Emory Johns' voice, faint, but clear enough to catch all of the words.

"I talked with Ed Wilse," Emory was saying, "and later I happened to run into Court Pender. I got a hunch on something, Will, but there's no sense talkin' about it till I got more to go on."

"You got something on your mind," Will Kelsey replied flatly, "spit 'er out! I'm still sheriff of this county, Emory. You go holdin' back information on the law, and you'll be fetchin' up into trouble your own self."

Now it was Emory's voice that was flat,

flat and stubborn. "I told you all I had was a hunch, Will. But there's kind of a personal angle to this, and I ain't washin' no dirty linen till I'm sure."

"Personal matter, is it? Maybe I better step down, Emory, and take some lessons from you on how a sheriff's office oughta be run!"

Then I heard the angry clatter of the pump. Will was working up to one of his rare frothy spells. I saw Sara Kelsey turn and walk leadenly back into the kitchen, her shoulders slumped dejectedly.

Personal, Emory had said. As far as I could read it, that could mean but one thing. Emory's "hunch"—the "personal angle"—must involve Courtney Pender!

Supper was not a happy meal. Will ate in a dour silence, and I had a feeling, each time Emory glanced up from his plate to look covertly at Amy, that the boy was in the throes of some bitter inner struggle. Amy, too, was strangely quiet, apparently sensing the undercurrent of tension in the room.

In a flutter of impatience, Sara Kelsey stood it until the dessert was finished. Then she pushed abruptly back from the table, glaring at her husband.

"Will Kelsey," she snapped, "you can put that pipe right back in your pants and help me clear away. Amy's done enough chorin' for one day, and Ben's practically fallin' asleep in his chair!" Her plump hands made brusque shooing motions towards Amy and Emory. "You young folks take a walk or go sit on the piazza. Scat, now! I got a bone to pick with Will. And the sooner I git started on it, the quicker we'll git these dishes done!"

I SEEMED to be in a boat that was rocking violently. Desperately, in a state that was half nightmare and half waking, I imagined myself tugging at a pair of oars, fighting to keep my tiny craft afloat in a choppy, tumultuous sea. Then a voice was calling to me, as from a great distance, and there was a sudden hollow roaring in my ears.

"Ben, wake up! Ben Short! Ben!"

I stared up at her groggily, dimly remembering, then, that after supper I had wandered in here to Will's den, and plopped down on his big leather sofa. After that, I hadn't remembered a thing.

"Amy," I muttered, and sat suddenly erect on the sofa, wheels of tiredness still spinning heavily, slowly, in the top of my head, "Anything—wrong? I guess I sort of—"

"They've gone!" Amy Pender blurted breathlessly. "To—to town, I guess. Both of them!"

I started. "To town? Will and Sara? But why—"

"Oh, I don't know, Ben, I don't know! Emory and I walked up as far as the corral. Then he told me he had to go back to—to town, but not to worry, everything would be all—all right." Her voice caught; then, controlling herself, she went on more calmly.

"Ma and Will were whittle-whanging in the kitchen when I got back. They—they must have seen Emory ride away. I went to my room. I had a bad headache. Then—I guess it was ten, fifteen minutes later, I heard a creaking sound outside and went to my window. It was ma—ma and Uncle Will—and when they got up to the road, they headed towards Desert Forge."

"Then maybe we'd better join the parade," I suggested grimly. "We get to Desert Forge, you hunt up Sara, and I'll scout around for Will. Likely we'll both feel better if we don't just set here twiddlin' our thumbs."

We didn't lallygag, and a fast thirty-minute ride brought us to Cradle Creek Bridge, at the edge of town. We crossed over, and five minutes later the lights of Desert Forge winked at us out of the darkness.

We rode into the main stem. Will's old tossel-topped buggy stood in front of Lef-finger's Hotel, a block downstreet. We got down there and hitched in front of the hotel's tie-rack.

We separated, and I started downstreet. I had no exact notion where Will would be, but I figured he'd be looking for Court Pender, so I tried the saloons first. I was on the left side of the street and had no luck there, so, reaching the end of the line, I crossed over and started back on the other side.

I passed two unlighted doorways, then came to a startled halt, in front of Jarnegan's Feed Store. The livery of Johns & Wilse stood next to Jarnegan's, and half hidden in the alley adjoining the stable I caught a glimpse of a horse, and in the next moment

recognized it as Emory Johns' blood bay skewbald.

I hadn't the faintest idea what Emory Johns would be doing here at the livery at this time of night, but I determined to find out. Swinging around, I crossed the deserted open threshold and was met by a heavy pungent odor of horses and stable scrapings. I stepped tentatively into the dim aisle between the stalls—the only light came from a smoky lantern, hung from a beam at the far end of the passageway—and then collided with something. At the same instant, a low, vehement voice drove at me huskily out of the dimness.

"Get your big clumsy clodhopper off my pet corn, Ben Short!"

"Sara!" I blurted. "What on earth—"

Sara's hoarse whisper exploded in my eardrums. "Keep your voice down," she warned tersely. "Somebody's back there in the office. Will's been out huntin' Emory, and I been tryin' to find Court. I just come from Jenny Partridge's. Seen Court headin-down this way, and thought mebbe—"

"Never mind that!" I cut her off brusquely. "Now listen to me. You stay here behind the door and keep watch on things. And if you hear anything, just let out a big sneeze. You got that straight?"

"Mebbe. But first I want to know what you're aimin' to do, Ben."

I said grimly, "I'm aimin' to keep you out of trouble, for one thing. Now you stay right here—understand?" I swung around and began a cautious, cat-footed pacing towards the end of the corridor. My goal was the small office at the rear of the stable. And if Court Pender was there. . . .

I let the thought dangle unfinished, hoping he wouldn't be. Hoping it for Sara's sake, Amy's sake. But a creepy feeling of expectancy tightened in me as I edged up to the outer circle of light. And at that moment I heard the voices, and came tensely to a halt.

I recognized one of the voices instantly as Emory Johns', but the other, muffled and indistinct, baffled me completely. Conscious of a sudden pulling stiffness in my legs, I started forward again. I reached the office door and saw that it was closed. Then I noticed the small window to the right, looking out on a narrow slot between the office wall and the end stall of the passageway. I slid into the cramped space.

THE small window was grimed with dust—smudged almost to opacity—but by stooping slightly, and peering through a lower square pane which seemed to be cleaner than the others, I was able to make out Emory's tall, spare figure, backed against the closed door. Then, as my glance shifted, I felt my breath lock abruptly. *The other man in the room was Ed Wilse!*

The light from a green-shaded coal oil lamp sprayed down on the desk behind which he sat, polishing his pink, satiny cheeks, and throwing a sinister blue dazzle from the big Texas Walker cramped in his fist and leveled at Emory Johns.

"So," he was saying in a flat, meager voice, "you think I killed Luther, do you?"

"You done it all right, Ed," I heard Emory answer quietly, evenly. "Only you didn't realize that wallet had dropped outta your pocket till you got back to town. You were scared to go back then, so you made up that yarn about a thief breakin' in here and stealin' it."

He went on deliberately. "Billy Danvers was holdin' your I.O.U. for a thousand, Ed—I found that out. Billy's a gambler, but he don't gamble on a bad debt. When Billy figures he's been played for a sucker, he goes lookin'. That's how come you took a notion to rob your own pardner. And kill him."

With only a vague half-awareness of going through the motions, I was winding the big blue bandanna around the knuckles of my right hand. Emory stood tensed, ready to jump, held back now by only a thin, twitching hair-spring of self-restraint.

Ed's voice twanged nasally, ugly with warning. "Don't try to jump me, kid. It wouldn't work. You got a few seconds yet. I want to know if you—"

I had my bandaged fist up, poised like a mallet. Abruptly, I drove it through one of the small glass panes of the window.

In spite of my precautions, I felt my wrist gashed by a chunk of jagged glass. At the same moment I had a hazy awareness of Ed Wilse's glance jerking towards the smashed pane, of a figure hurtling at him across the desk like a shadowy catapult. There was a blast of gun fire, and then Emory and Ed Wilse were grappled together, and then another shot blared, racketing inside the small office like a drum roll.

Time telescoped into an abrupt appalling quiet, and vaguely, I realized that my wrist was spurting blood. I lowered the bandanna and made a tight tourniquet above the gashed flesh. Outside, there was the sound of a door closing softly. Then footsteps echoed in the passageway. Cobwebs brushed my face as I turned, dizzily, and groped my way towards the spread of light outside the office door.

Emory stood there, his eyes round with wonder, staring at Sara Kelsey.

"Thank—thank God!" I heard her ejaculate weakly.

"It's all right, Miz Kelsey. Now, now—"

Why, it was Emory who'd said that. Emory Johns. Alive. And Ed Wilse there in that room, dead. Not Sara's brother.

She was in his arms then, sobbing her relief, crying like any shameless fool of a woman. And Emory was holding her tight. Holding her and murmuring against her ear, "Now, ma, now, ma."

"I ought to be gittin' over to the office," Will Kelsey said to his wife. His feet plumped down from the gallery railing of the hotel. "I'll have to write a report on this."

"Let Ben, here, write the report," Sara

Kelsey told him. "He'll need the practice, with you resignin', as of right now!" She swung around abruptly. "Now where in nation's that Emory? Last I seen, him and Amy was headin' upstreet."

"Seemed to be goin' in the direction of Park Henebry's," I murmured.

"Where they sell rings and such," Will remarked, a little smugly. "Personal matter, I reckon."

Sara Kelsey creaked up out of her chair. "Will, I'll need your wallet. If I'm gonna be matron-of-honor at a weddin', I'll have to have me some fixin's."

Will hoisted himself up and began fishing reluctantly in his hip pocket. "Reckon Court'll be givin' the bride away," he mentioned wistfully. "Court really did have them mine shares, I found out. Struck it pretty lucky."

His hand stayed poised at his hip, still hopefully retaining its grip on the wallet.

Playfully, Sara Kelsey dug him in the ribs. Somehow, in the process, her hand closed around the wallet, and Will looked sternly around at me.

"Ben," he said, "I'm givin' you your first case. I just been robbed—and you seen who done it!"

Answers to CATTLE COUNTRY QUIZ

(Questions on page 77)

1. True. The old time Western term, "to longear" referred to the placing of a silk handkerchief on the ground and then placing the ear against it. Those who knew said this would magnify sound.

2. The term "long trail" refers to death.

3. A "mesa" is either a table or a flat tableland.

4. True. The term "mesquital" is used in reference to land covered with mesquite.

5. If the ranch boss sent you out for a "navvy," you should return with a Navaho Indian pony.

6. True. Authorities tell us the word "mustang" comes from the Spanish, *mesteño*.

7. True. The cowpoke will sometimes use "paddle" in reference to the gait of a horse.

8. An over-slope is a type of earmark.

9. If the ranch boss sent you out for a "piggin' string," you should return with a rope used for hog-tying.

10. "Piket" is a cowpoke slang expression for skunk.

11. If a tenderfoot were sent out for some "prairie wool," he should return with some grass.

12. "To bring potluck" means for a guest to bring food with him.

13. True. The word "race" refers to a crooked blaze on the forehead of a horse.

14. Range is the open country where cattle graze.

15. False. To "rib up" means to persuade, and does not mean to tease or annoy.

16. True. "Riding safe" means that a rider presses his legs tight against the horse, sits close in the saddle, etc.

17. If a Western badman were said to have "rolled his tail," this would mean he had left in a hurry.

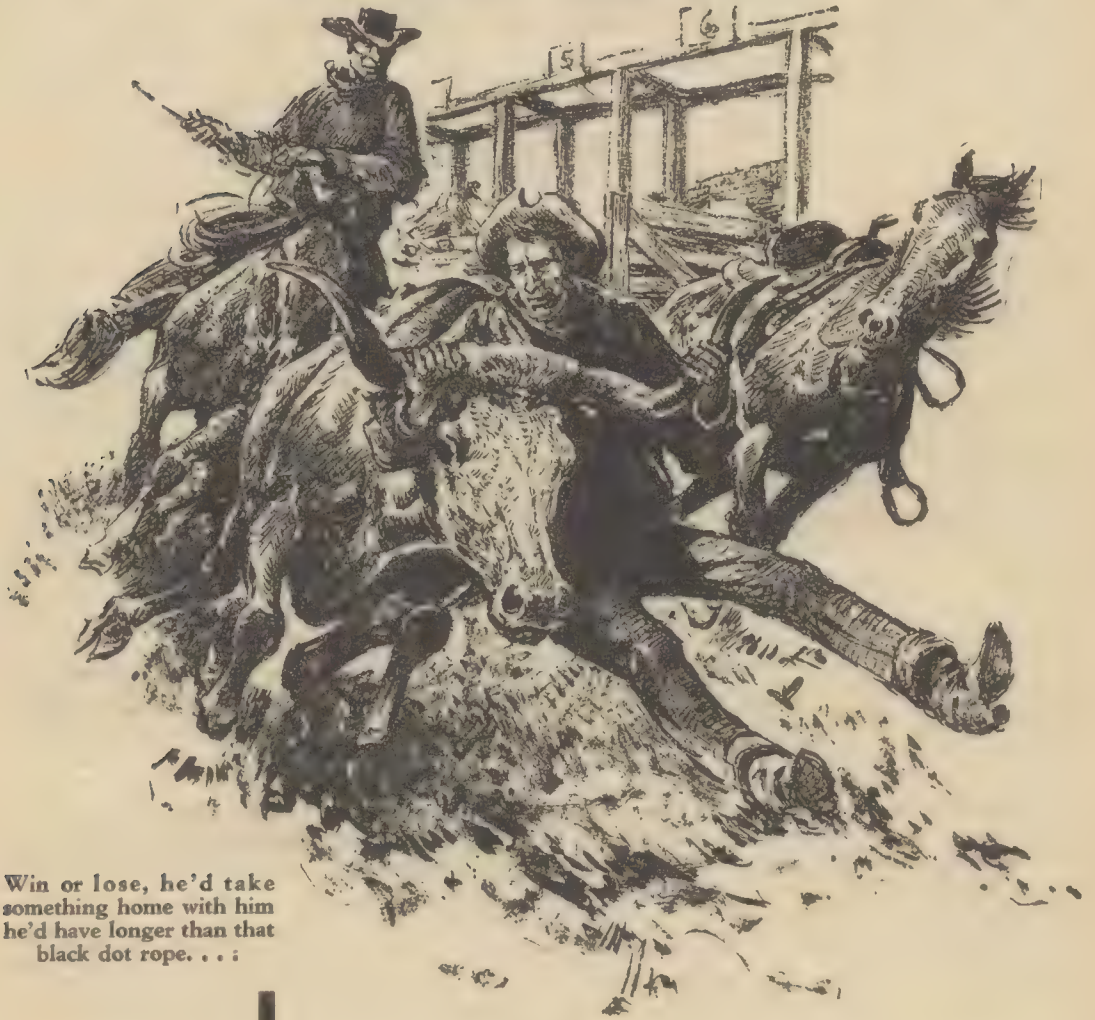
18. True. A "romal" is a whip found on the bridle reins where they are fastened together.

19. In a running mount, the horse is mounted on the run and the stirrups not used.

20. Yes. Sabinas are cattle of red and white peppered coloring.

THE KILLER

By FRANK BONHAM



Win or lose, he'd take something home with him he'd have longer than that black dot rope. . . :

I
"A steer can throw a man a whole lot farther than a man can throw the bull—but the bull, mister, don't have to prove it!"
I

TWO days before the brush meet in Alturas, George Taylor and his boy were working cattle in the old stone corral under Indian Hill. Except in busy seasons, the Taylors did all the work on the ranch themselves. It was a tribute to their industry that they were able to do it—a subtle reflection on big George Taylor's middling success at his age that he had so little range that he could.

But they were bound to be slipshod in some things, and there were quite a number of cattle to be caught this fall which had

been missed in the spring. Because of the ankle he had broken a year ago, young Joe was roping, his father flanking the calves. There were a few big beeves in the corral which hadn't been touched since they were born. One of them was a long two-year old with some Brahma blood, a rangy yellow creature with a bad eye.

George finished with a calf, flipped off the pigging string, and pointed out this big young bull. "That'n," he said.

He watched Joe swing off to roust a little bunch of calves out of a corner, and he was obscurely touched . . . So young and prideful, the boy—tall and still gangling, blond and brown-eyed, much more sober now than he had been before the accident when his ankle was snapped.

The moment whipped George Taylor back in time.

He'd been working cattle in this same corral, and he wasn't much older than Joe, though little Joe was sleeping in the ranch-house a mile away. And he had been as full of ambition then as his boy was now. But time had been the teacher of him, time and death and the misadventures that came to every man. So now he was working cattle in the same small corral and no longer tormenting himself with his failure.

Yet he wasn't satisfied to wish his boy the same as he had had. And he had come to a point where he had to disguise love as cruelty in order to help Joe over the wall his accident had brought him to.

"Well, bring him on!" George shouted. Joe looked back, a little surprised, as if his father should know this was the wildest critter on the ranch and not to be choused into a thing.

"Come on, now!" George shouted again. "Ain't got till Christmas."

George had been tormenting that bull for two months, drilling sass into him—running him, roping him, driving him from his favorite cows. The bull was ducking his head at Joe's pony and plowing along the wall as if he might decide to jump it, if he didn't decide to kill the horse.

Whilst Joe tried to get near the animal, George shouted angrily, "I don't aim to saw off those horns while he's a-travelling! Rope him!"

Joe's face heated. But he let the little cutting pony work—going neatly with its dodging as it tried to work the bull out for

roping. But just as Joe would swing his rope, the bull would be gone again.

Suddenly Taylor bawled, "'Dog him down, then, dammit!"

He saw the boy's dusty face. Bulldog that brute? Last year, maybe, before he'd hurt his ankle. But the injury still tormented him. It had been in the nature of a treat, in the past, when an animal needed the fight pounded out of it and George would let the boy bulldog it down.

Joe silently hung his rope over the saddlehorn and came up in the stirrups. He waited until the animal was in a corner. Then he whooped and put the pony after it. The bull broke out and lunged along the wall.

George closed his eyes as his son leaned out to drop on the bull's horns. *Am I doing right?* he wondered. If the bone should snap again, Joe's ankle might be done for. And he would hate his father for it. But some things were worth a big risk to avoid, and one of them was cowardice.

George heard the boy swear. He opened his eyes; the bull had broken loose. It was across the corral, and Joe was staring hotly after it.

"Breachiest critter I ever did see!" he declared.

For an instant they were looking at each other. Both of them knew the cutting pony wasn't capable of losing its steer so close up. Both of them knew he had let it get away because he was afraid of it.

"Well, never mind," George grunted. "We'll pick him up another time."

At the end of the day they boiled a pot of Arbuckle against a stone corner of the Indian diggings on the hill. Big and loosely-built, George Taylor had a brown face full of vertical ruts, and gray eyes under thorny brows. He hesitated a long time before he spoke.

"We ought to take off for town tomorrow morning. Give you time to rest up before the roping the next day. Dewey Core will sweat tallow when he sees you with a number on your sleeve!"

"I reckon he would," Joe smiled. He and Dewey had been rodeo rivals most of their lives, as kids and now as young men.

"Would be surprised—or will?"

"I'm pretty rusty, Dad. I've hardly dogged a steer since I cracked my ankle. Oh, I may have a crack at it," he shrugged.

George knew every steer Joe had bull-

dogged in the herd this spring. He had watched him. He knew he was at the top of his form, if he had the guts to tackle a real animal. If he didn't enter the steer wrestling, it would be because he was afraid of being hurt again.

"I'd shore like to see you take him," George chuckled. "You've been beating Dewey since you were knee-high to a branding iron. With you out of it, his old man's bragging would make me sick to my stomach."

"I'll ride if my ankle isn't bothering me."

His father cleared his throat. "You don't want to get into the habit of favoring that ankle, Joe."

The boy's eyes were then angry. "I'm not yellow," he said, "if that's what you're trying to get across."

"No, no! I only meant—" While he was trying to find the right words, Joe walked off.

George felt defeated. He had not got the idea across to him—that through favoring yourself, and letting others favor you—you acquired a taste for pity. You let tomorrow take care of itself. But tomorrow is a helpless child, and seldom does.

Joe was too young to remember the years his father had spent crippling around with a hip stiff by a fall from a horse. But looking at his patched and creaking possessions, George remembered too well....

This rodeo at Alturas would never create a ripple a hundred miles away. It was just a little one-day roping on which the rest of Joe's life might depend.

ALTURAS was a tree-shaded little cowtown under a red cliff. Small Mexican farms festooned it with greenery. Ranches reached out onto the prairie and a railroad and a stream were its chief prides.

George and Joe made camp in the trees the night before the rodeo. In the morning, breakfast fires smoking up and down the creek, Joe went off to hunt up some friends.

Finishing with tidying up the camp, George strolled to the fairgrounds. Already there was a colorful sprinkle of holiday gingham in the small grandstand, with a masculine sobriety of faded denim. Thrusting through a noisy congregation of young riders and old die-hards, George put fifteen dollars on the judge's table before Doc Charlie Prine.

"Give me one of those rags," he said, "and write 'Joe Taylor' in the blank."

Prine glanced up, surprised. He was a lean old fellow with a face like a goat. "What event—calf roping?"

"Go to hell," George said mildly. "He's going to whip the socks off Dewey Core in the bulldogging."

Doc wrote in Joe's name. Then he pulled George aside.

"This your idea or Joe's?"

"Joe's."

"That's all right, then. If I was you, George, I wouldn't want it on my head if anything should happen."

"Why should anything happen? Ain't that ankle as sound as one of mine, now?"

"Considerably sounder," said the doctor, who had set it. "The danger would be in him favoring it. A lot of these repeat fractures happen just that way. Fellow gets to favoring one leg and throws himself off balance. But if Joe thinks he's ready, why good luck to him."

"He is," George said, a little testily, because of the clammy uncertainty that had been set off in him. "I suppose there's still a little pain in it, though, eh?"

A smile quirked the thin lips above Doc's ragged goatee. "Yes, George, there's a-bound to be. But there probably will be for some time. So you tell Joe to go right ahead with any plans he's made, unless he's afraid of the hurting. That hip of yours give you a twinge now and then?" he asked. Prine had set the hip after George's fall with a bronc on a ranch where he was breaking horses.

"Not for ten years."

"You did a bit of favoring yourself, for a while."

"I babied myself for years," George admitted. "And I'd still be crippling around, if my saddle blanket hadn't picked up thistles one night when I slept on it. That horse went up north and come down south! But by George, I rode him down! And it was an hour before I realized the hip I'd been favoring was as sound as oak."

And by that time, he could have told the doctor, the pattern had been set. He had forgotten how to scratch for a thing. He had gotten into the habit of getting it easily, or doing without.

Prine nodded. "Just remember people ain't horses, though, George, in case he begins to buck. But good luck to you."

An hour later, George was watching Joe put a high shine on his wine-colored town boots before going up to the grandstand. Joe's eyes were solemn, his mouth had a drag. George knew the mood—too well he knew it! He bit the end off a cigar and watched the boy Joe put his weight on his ankle and wince.

An obscure anger suddenly drove George to his feet. "Have I got to watch you baby that ankle for the rest of my life? If it hurts you, keep off your feet. If it don't—quit treatin' it like was egg-shells."

Joe swung angrily. "Like to swap me for a while? I wouldn't see you jumping any fences."

"By God, you wouldn't see me hemmin' and hawin' before them!"

"I was trying to decide something," Joe told him. "I don't see where it's any of your say-so what I do, if I carry my share of the ranch work."

"Oh, you carry it all right," George said sarcastically. "You just take all day to do a two-hour job, that's all."

Both of them turned as they heard gravel crunch in the trees. Two men came into sight, approaching the camp. When he saw them, Taylor's fists clamped hard. Dewey Core and his father could not have picked a worse time to drop in. They were both silent, then, as the Cores came up.

Dewey's father, Spide, was a wiry little black-haired fellow with a perpetual grin that meant nothing. He wore it when he was lying to you about whether he'd seen a missing bull of yours. He wore it when you'd beaten him in a horse trade. He was dark as an Apache, with dusty black hair silvering above the ears. He was grinning as he spoke.

"Look at them Fancy-Dan boots, Dewey! I guess that tells us whether or not he's going to contest this year."

"Well, Spide," Joe grinned, "some fellers wear old clothes when they ride, and some don't figure on getting mussed up."

"Which is it with you?" Dewey asked. A short, big-shouldered young fellow, Dewey had pale eyes in a brown face, and a wide mouth that was a splinter of white when he smiled. He was the fightingest bulldogger George had ever seen—next to Joe.

"Why don't you wait and see?" Joe suggested.

His father laughed. "Don't be coy, Joe.

Pin this thing on." He tossed the brassard to Joe, who caught it, startled.

Joe unfolded the big Number Seven. Dewey slapped him on the back. "Seven sounds lucky to me! Pin it on! But I'll give you a run for your money."

"You mean to say you came down in them clothes to bulldog oxes?"

Joe had to go along with it, now. "Like I said—some of us don't figure on getting mussed up."

"You'll get mussed up for fair, before you take first-place money away from Dewey."

"Shut up, you old swindler," Dewey said. "Joe, let's go look them over. There's a couple of mean-looking critters we ought to shake hands with beforehand."

As they left, George said, "I guess this will steal a little of Dewey's thunder, eh?"

"Will it? The thunder they pay off on comes after the chute opens." Spide snapped that and strode away.

GEORGE felt better when they announced Joe's name in the steer-wrestling contest. The bleacher's shouted greeting sent gooseflesh over him. After the yelling and clapping died, someone shouted, "I've got ten on him, George!"

"Better make it twenty," George called back.

There were qualifying rides for the saddle-bronc contest and the bareback. This was just a cow-country rodeo in which the whole thing—preliminaries, semi-finals, and finals—went off in one day.

Al Turlock charged out after a gray steer, the first in the bulldogging. He dropped on the animal's horns and disappeared in dust. He reappeared, fighting the steer down.

Then there was another steer in the chute, another rider behind the foul line. George's belly was a cold fist of muscles. *I could be wrong*, he thought. *I could be wrong!*

It was Dewey Core who came out this time, and Dewey made an astonishingly bad showing against a shambling steer. When it finally dropped, George knew something: Dewey was going to do his damndest to let Joe win!

A growl came up out of his chest. That was the kind of friend Dewey Core was! To lay at Joe's feet a title he ought to fight for—to plant the notion in his head that people would be doing it right along, because he broke his ankle once!

A voice piped through a cardboard megaphone. "You all know this next rider, folks! It's Joe Taylor, making his bid for that black-dot manila rope!"

George sat with his head tilted down and his hands clenched on a rolled program. The gate flipped open, the stands roared and a steer lunged onto the sprinkled earth. Joe trailed him nearly to the fence, making up his mind to drop. In the hot sunlight he was awkwardly wrestling the steer as it lunged on, his heels plowing the dirt.

At last the miserable fight was over. A hazer was bulling the steer away and Joe limped back to the chutes. It was the worst bulldogging George had seen in years.

Suddenly he got up and walked behind the chutes, the preliminaries over. They were announcing the names of the winners. Six boys would go into the semi-finals, including Dewey and Joe.

Spide Core was with some other ranchers. Joining them, George received their congratulations.

"Well, Joe ain't one to let a thing like a fracture stand between him and a bulldogging contest," he said cocksurely.

"Figure the boy's got a chance, George?" asked Ike Tilden.

"Chance, he says! Did you see the kind of 'dogging those other youngsters were doing? They ain't had enough competition since Joe got hurt. They've gone soft. Why, shoot, if I couldn't dog an ox faster than Dewey—begging your pardon, Spide—I wouldn't trust myself on a horse."

Spide colored under their laughter. "You're making sounds like a man that wants to bet, George," he remarked.

George shrugged. "Don't see where I could lose, against a boy that can't make up his mind whether to marry an ox or spill it."

"You know," Spide said, "I couldn't tell whether Joe was going to wrestle that steer of his or just keep on racing it."

"You could find out what he's going to do next time. It might cost you a little money."

Spide said with a bite, "I'd risk fifty dollars right quick."

"I was covering bigger bets than that before I could ride a horse," George stated. "I'll put up two hundred dollars against the use of your Three Creeks pasture this winter."

At once Spide Core saw what he had been

maneuvered into. All last winter and spring he had bought the hay George would need the following winter, unless he cut his herd down to nothing. Being Spide, he had no doubt dreamed of selling it back to him when the snows came—at double prices.

Under the grinning stares of the ranchers, Spide said tartly: "It's a bet. But I know a cowman that's going to be out two hundred dollars when Joe Taylor comes sliding out on his hip pockets."

Sitting behind the hog-wire bleachers fence, George thought, *By God, there won't be any coasting in this man's rodeo! Spide would tell Dewey to get out there and earn his board.*

George lunged to his feet as Joe's steer rocketed from the gate. Shoulders hunched, Joe came after him. The steer was slippery. Joe's hazer kept quirting him back, but Joe could not get a shot at the brute. Finally he yanked his boot from the stirrup, poised an instant and flopped onto the steer. Blind with fury, the steer was driving closer to the fence. The boy was slung under the steer's horn with his heels plowing the turf ahead of them. Fear fountained up in George.

"Dog him down, Joe!" he bawled.

He saw the boy's foot strike the wire and twist. Joe writhed. The impact stopped the ox and Joe screwed its neck up tight. It flopped onto its side. The field judge ducked his flag and Joe let the bull lumber away.

He hesitated for a moment, looking at his foot. Then he took hold of his hazer's stirrup and pulled himself up. He took two steps and the foot broke under him.

A cold dew of perspiration broke out on George. He started to climb the fence. But then he saw Joe get up again and, limping heavily but walking straight, head back to the chutes....

GEORGE waited until they had announced the finalists. When he heard Joe's name with Al Turlock's and Dewey Core's, he got up quickly. Joe was drinking a tin cup of coffee near a booth. His face sharpened when he saw his father.

"It was a good warm-up, anyhow," George told him. "Next year we'll show them.... How's the ankle?"

Joe's eyes were muddy as ditch-water. "You reckon we'll have your gambling debts paid off by then?"

George's eyes shifted. "Oh, that! Spide! I will call it off."

"You will like hell. Not if I know Spide. And not if I know me."

"Cut it out! I—I asked Doc about you before I bought your brassard. He figured you might do better to wait, if it began giving you trouble."

"Next time you want to ask somebody something, ask me. Ask me if I want to be stuck with a bet my old man can't afford. Ask me if I want to bust myself up to keep from looking like a coward. Bet on yourself, next time you feel athletic."

George watched him limp away. Damned for a hard heart, he reflected, when he was too soft-hearted for his own good.

Competition was down to a few dirty-faced and limping finalists. Al Turlock, riding in the saddle-bronc contest, won a forty-dollar stock saddle but sprained an elbow so that he was out of the steer-wrestling finals.

They called Dewey's name first. Spide was talking to him from the top bar of the chutes. Dewey nodded and spat. He was a tough, dark-haired chunk of gristle with two good arms and two good ankles. The gate flashed aside.

Yelling like a Comanche, Dewey raced after his ox. Landing on the nigh horn, he hit the dirt with both heels shearing ahead like a plow. Still the brute ran. Dewey twisted until the big white face was nearly upside down. He fell back with the steer in his lap as the flag descended.

There was a delighted yelp from the stands when they gave the time a few moments later. But George realized glumly that Joe would have to gamble even for a tie.

He saw Joe coming up to the line. Suddenly a bitter sort of peace was in him. This was how it had to be. It was the last thing he could do for Joe—the final lesson a father could teach a son. That everything he got, he would have to fight for.

Lanky, yellow-haired, very young, Joe rapped the saddlehorn with the baton. The gate clattered. The steer was out and running. Joe's pony rammed into its side, but he seemed to have trouble getting set. George was bawling advice, with everyone else, making motions with his hands as though he himself were about to tackle the steer.

Joe boomed onto it with both hands reaching. At that instant the pony swerved. Joe was left dangling over the ground with nothing under him. Desperately, he seized an inch of horn and a handful of loose neckhide. The steer dragged him, kicking viciously with a hind leg.

Suddenly Joe hauled himself up and got a grasp on that off-horn. He began to wind the steer up; an instant later it stumbled.

For George, clutching the wire fence, it was like those times when Joe was a toddler and had been about to fall from a wagon or step in the way of a team, and George had lunged forward just in time to save him. But there was a fence between them.

He shouted a warning. It was lost in the cry of the bleachers. With the rest, he could only watch Joe swing in under the massive neck as the steer fell. The steer's front legs had caved. Its weight came down on Joe as they slid along.

When the steer finally toppled over, Joe was under it, though one hand still clutched a horn. A field judge waved his flag just before it lunged up. But Joe lay there, his arm falling across his face.

It was quiet. Someone loped out and Doc Prine ran onto the field with his bag.

Prine had Joe's shirt open when George crowded through the loose circle of riders. The boy's face was like gray tallow. George brushed the moist, fair hair out of Joe's face. There was a look of death in his quiet features. Prine began feeling Joe's legs over for fractures. He got down to that left ankle and George was breathing windily through his nose.

"Well, that'n won't give him any trouble," Prine decided.

Joe came around a few moments later. He looked at them. A frown pulled his forehead and he sat up.

"Little winded, eh?" asked the doctor.

"Let that ox set on your chest sometime," said Joe, getting up. He waved the men off. "Was it good?" he asked the field judge.

"It wasn't no dog fall. I'll get the time."

Then Dewey Core came in to pound him on the back, and George was just another man drifting from the field. Well, the kid wouldn't understand. Why try to explain it? But win or lose, he would take something home with him he'd have a lot longer than that blackdot rope.

(Continued on page 112)



DEVIL'S GOLD

By RAY P. SHOTWELL

BROWN County, Texas, is named after one of its famous sheriffs, but the son of Sheriff Brown didn't carry the name so well. In fact, after he hit the owlhoot, Walter Brown, sheriff's son, didn't carry that name at all. He was known mainly as Bronco Bill, and he resembled his father in only one thing.

He was a leader.

The biggest, last thing Bill did, was to hold up the Santa Fe gold train between Shawnee and Grant, New Mexico. He and his men made off with some forty thousand dollars, and headed north, looking for hills to hide in. A local posse came on the bunch at night, sleeping in a cold camp. The sheriff in charge of that posse had one thing in common with Bronco Bill's father—he didn't know Bronco Bill very well. Instead of throwing down on the sleeping outlaws, he insisted on waking them up, and reading them a warrant before taking them in.

They shot him to death for his pains, and escaped—but not before the posse had succeeded in driving off their horses.

With a twenty-mile walk to shelter and water ahead of them, forty thousand in gold felt heavy. The walking fugitives cached their loot in the dry bed of the Puerco River. They knew they would find it again. The landmarks were unmistakable. The

loop in the river-bed . . . the odd crevice on the bank . . . the rock formation . . . all those things would signify the spot to them when they returned this way, on horseback. And so, each man carrying only the price of a horse and saddle, rich enough for any sheriff's son, the bunch walked straight into the hands of another posse.

Walter Brown, alias Bronco Bill, and most of his men, were sentenced to spend the rest of their lives in the prison at Santa Fe. Only one train-robber, the baby of the bunch, was let off with five years, because of his extreme youth.

This man, upon release, returned to the Puerco River. The months turned into years almost as long and tedious as his prison term had been, while he looked for the mark of Bronco Bill, and the stolen Santa Fe gold.

He gave up, at last. There seemed easier ways of finding forty thousand dollars.

Anybody can look for it, still. The loop in the river-bed . . . the odd crevice . . . the rock formation . . . all those patterns are there, repeated ad infinitum. Under the millionth one, there may be a fortune.

And that is the story of the man who gave up his father's name. Brown County, Texas, is likely to last for a long time. So is the lost landmark of Bronco Bill . . . but Brown County's a heap easier to find.

*There's forty thousand dollars in
gold waiting for you in Texas
but you'll have to swap places with
it underground.*



REBEL HORSES SOUTH



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"The hell with you, Colonel! You buy your men cheap—an' you get what you pay for. I'm a rebel sure—an' I go the whole way for my outfit. Treason an' be damned!"



Teacum rode headlong
into the sentry. . . .

By
**LANCE
KERMIT**

CHAPTER ONE

Galvanized Yank

PPRIVATE DICK TEACUM, Seventh Ohio Volunteer Cavalry, sat his blooded charger on the crest of a low knoll. He looked down on the wagon camp of the Oregon-bound Kansas Jayhawkers and Redlegs. The broken circle of fires below him danced on the white canvas wagontops, danced in the trooper's narrowed black eyes. Behind him rose the squat shadows of a bastioned log stockade—Fort Aspenhut, the Union's tiny outpost on the Indian frontier. Ahead, the star-

studded sky came down to meet the rolling grass prairies in the distance, almost on a level with his eye.

A thin smile was on the trooper's sun-cracked lips, a grim, triumphant smile; his dark eyes were impatient and alert. For here, at hand, was the thing for which his six-foot frame had ached for more than a year—a chance to strike once more for Jackson County and Jeff Davis. Here was the chance Hig Baker had promised him if he would lend a hand in Hig's enterprise

of stealing horses along the Great Medicine Road and trailing them south to recoup the gray cavalry of the beleaguered Confederacy.

Hig Baker, Teacum knew, was an old hand at guerrilla warfare. The tall, black-bearded Tennessean had ridden with Quantrell's freebooters before joining up with the Confederate Provisional Army. And right now Hig's hell-for-leather guerrillas were somewhere in the gloom around the red-winking fires, maneuvering to get between the night herders and the camp. There would be a few sudden shots, a curdling Indian yell or two, and the train's horses would be stampeded off into the night.

The thought of leaving the hundred men, women and children stranded a thousand miles from civilization, with no stock to roll their wagons, wasn't pleasant contemplation. But this was war, Private Teacum told himself; and war has no conscience—particularly this war, in which son fought father, and brother killed brother. Neither did it trouble Teacum greatly that he now wore the blue. He did so against his will and principles. He wouldn't wear it after this night.

It came then—a thin, yammering, coyote wail from the night. It was Hig Baker's signal that his raiders had consolidated their positions within striking distance of the unwary stock herders.

Whistling softly, Teacum pushed his charger toward the small band of blooded horses that grazed on the slope of the grass knoll above him. These horses, fifty in number, represented the sum and total of the Fort Aspenhut riding stock. Teacum's part in the raid was to stampede the garrison horses, thereby insuring Hig Baker's guerrillas against pursuit. Hig Baker was a cautious man. Also, fifty cavalry horses such as these would look like the dome of the Yankee Capitol at Washington to old General Price, somewhere below the Arkansas.

It had cost Teacum a pint of Indian rotgut to get the stock-guard for the night drunk. But that was cheap operating, and it had been easily accomplished because Old Iron Neck Ivy, crusty colonel in charge of Aspenhut, was down at the wagon camp with the rest of his small command, chewing the fat with the pilgrims. When the fat-

heads awoke to what was happening, they would find themselves afoot at their fort in the middle of the American desert.

Teacum smiled in wry satisfaction at his own idea of what the bigwig Yanks in Washington would say to Iron Neck when he had to report that "Indians" had raided a wagon train camped within the very shadow of Aspenhut, driven off the wagon stock and the post horses as well.

The trooper was near enough to the horse herd to hear their teeth squeaking on the tough prairie grass, and he reined up. Hig's next signal was slow in coming, and Teacum sat his impatient horse, immobile as a Sioux, listening.

This night would end Dick Teacum's year of self-imposed slavery at Fort Aspenhut. No more, after this night, would he lick dirt for old Iron Neck; no more would he have to endure the scorn and sovereign contempt of the other bluecoats because he was a "Galvanized Yank," a captured rebel who served the Union on the frontier rather than rot in a prison camp.

No, it was back to the south now, back in a blaze of glory with horses for Price and McCulloch and the other harassed generals who kept the fires of the Confederacy burning bright on their own side of the Arkansas. Such service would erase forever the disgrace Dick Teacum had incurred with the gray; it would blot out forever the trumped-up charges that had convicted him of treason against the Confederate States of America two years before.

Old Iron Neck would laugh on the other side then. If he and his bluecoat pill-swallowers were smart enough, they would see then why he had joined their outfit.

Still Hig's signal didn't come. Teacum yielded to whim and turned his charger down the slope toward the wagon camp. Might as well wait down there. The Federals were afoot and the Jayhawkers would soon be. He could get away quick enough to spook the Yank horses off with him when the alarm of the attack went up. And maybe the Jayhawkers would know something of the folks back in Missouri—in Jackson County, where Teacum was raised.

"Who goes there?" the wagon train sentry challenged.

"Private Teacum, Seventh Ohio," the trooper responded. "Ridin' in to palaver."

"Right welcome, soldier," said the Jayhawker. "Ride in an' find yourself a campfire. They're dancin' in a minute, so grab yourself a gal."

TEACUM grinned and pushed his horse through the gap in the corralled wagons. If the Jayhawkers were dancing, they wouldn't be worried about their stock. He might as well step a square or two himself until the alarm sounded, even if the lady did come from the wrong side of the Missouri.

He left his horse back in the shadows near the narrow gateway to the circular corral, admirably situated for a quick getaway, and approached the bright sagebrush fires. But the sight of old Iron Neck and Captain Beck and Davies in confab with what looked like the captain of the train brought a quick scowl to his face and turned him away from the big central fire.

He walked on.

Uniforms of lesser rank at other fires turned him from these also, for Private Teacum, or "Galve" as he was known to the other Yanks at Aspenhut, was covertly proud of the blue he wore that night. It would set him up in the eyes of the Redleg girls. Furthermore, he had never been admitted to the society of the other Yanks, except on patrol, and he didn't want to be called "Galve" in front of the girls. It would spoil the fun.

So he wandered from fire to fire, keeping back in the shadows and attracting no attention until he found one fire at which no Yank had yet appeared. A guitar and a strident fiddle sounded somewhere in the camp, and a husky, plaintive voice came up in mournful four-four time:

*Oh Susannah! Oh don't you cry for me,
For I'm a'goin' to Oregon with my hand
plow on my knee.*

Teacum paused at the edge of the reddish orbit cast by the fire and gazed for a minute at the couples who danced awkwardly on the uneven ground. Gradually he became aware of a girl who stood near him, a girl whose face was concealed by the wide-brimmed poke bonnet she wore, but whose slim, long-legged grace of body could never be concealed by the hoops and stays that armored her.

"Galve" Teacum screwed up his courage and stepped to her side. He touched her

arm, doffed his service cap and bowed with starched gallantry.

"Pardon, miss. May I beg the honor of—" The trooper's voice thickened, stuck in his throat; his hard, lean trunk froze in the midst of that gentle bow. He stood rigid, thus, with head and chest out-thrust. His eyes were wide and fixed upon the girl's face, now visible in the dancing light.

The girl's own eyes were wide, eager yet pained—the dark bay pigments that Teacum remembered so well were almost black in the bad light—and her face was white as the wagon canvas behind her. She reached out one small hand to touch him, as though to see if he were real. Teacum thrilled to her touch.

"Dick Teacum!" she murmured, unbelieving.

"Paula!" Teacum breathed the name as something sacred. "Paula Livingston!"

The girl's fingers tightened on his arm until they hurt, and for a breathless, exciting moment, they searched each other's eyes. The girl swayed as if to faint, then wrenched herself erect.

Teacum flushed as he felt her eyes on his uniform, his Union cap and his cavalry boots. For Paula Livingston had last seen him in the gray of the South, and Paula was as Southern as the orchid.

When at last the trooper had recovered his breath to speak, the girl had presented him a profile as proud and as cool as the face on the Yankee dollar.

"I don't believe I know any Galvanized Yankees," she murmured in a voice that wasn't quite steady. "Anyway, I'm waiting for my partner for this dance, Captain Davies. He was born a Union man, I hear, and is therefore bearable."

Teacum could only stare at the delicately chiseled face, more beautiful than ever in its coldness and its contempt. His brain was whirling, and he felt a little sick. It couldn't be true. Paula Livingston couldn't be here, in this forsaken wilderness, halfway to Oregon.

Paula Livingston had left Jackson County for Montgomery to live with her great-aunt the day her father marched away to serve Jeff Davis. Her father, Colonel Ben Livingston—Old Bloody Bridles, as he was affectionately known to his men—had been Teacum's own commander in the days he had served with the Confederate Provisional

Army. And this minute Old Bridles was with Price somewhere below the Arkansas—there, or on General Sam Curtis' flank in Missouri.

But Teacum didn't reflect long on this. He was too awe-stricken with what else he saw. The people about him were not Jayhawkers and Redlegs, as Hig Baker had said. Many of them were known to Teacum, and he shrank from them. They were Missourians. They were the Jackson County folks who had remained loyal to the South and who had been persecuted for it. They were the folks whose mistreatment Quantrell had pretended to avenge on his campaigns of murder.

What their presence here meant, Teacum couldn't guess. Nor did he try, for coming toward him out of the darkness was old Bloody Bridles himself—Old Bridles, who ought to be with Price wherever Price was since Teacum had heard of him. And with the old Confederate colonel was Captain Tony Davies of the Aspenhut garrison, chief among Teacum's tormentors.

OLD BRIDLES had changed mightily in the two years since Teacum had served him as Captain of Dragoons, Provisional Army, CSA. He was shorter by several inches, and his once glossy beard was now white as the snow-mantled cones of the distant Wind River Mountain. He still wore his old gray officer's coat and the Confederate hat. But the rest of his clothing might have been salvaged from the village dump back home. It bespoke great poverty.

His eyes, however, had the same flintlock fire as before, and his shoulders were square as ever. He stopped before his daughter, and his voice was gentle and concerned. "The captain thought he saw someone bothering you, Paula."

Then he saw Teacum. He stared a moment as if he too could not believe what his eyes told him. Then a fierce scorn kindled in them, and he screwed up his bearded lips in great distaste.

"Well, spank me if it ain't Cap'n Teacum," the old warrior said then, with distinct, measured contempt. "Traitor, deserter, and Galvanized Yank. Smells mighty bad around here, Paula. Come over to my fire. It ain't so crowded over there."

Teacum wanted to cry out after them, to

ask them what they were doing here, a thousand miles from Missouri, while a war for a nation was being fought. He wanted to tell them again that he wasn't guilty of the crime he had been accused of at Springfield; that he had escaped only in order to live and prove his innocence; that the Yanks had captured him, and that he had joined them for frontier service only on the chance that he might be able to help the Confederacy in some way.

His confusion became complete when he saw the Livingstons stop at the fire where old Iron Neck sat with his aides, and heard Old Bridles addressed as "colonel." Ben Livingston was leader of the pilgrim train, Ben Livingston who ought to be carrying the Confederate torch into Illinois with Price and Fighting Jo Shelby.

Teacum became aware then of a smiling face directly in front of him, a handsome, mustached face that smiled with benevolent contempt. It was Captain Tony Davies.

"Sorry, Galve," the Yank said with mock regret, "but you seem to be annoying the ladies. You better ride back to the post."

Teacum looked deep into those scornful eyes, and all the frustrated fury and resentment of the years welled up inside him. He judged carefully the distance to the tip of the supercilious nose; his body tensed.

"Is that an order, Captain?"

"It's an order, Galve."

The bluecoat captain's tone released the thousand springs that held Teacum's long body rigid. He lashed out with all the force of his fury, and his big fist smashed the sneering officer squarely on the point of his very military chin. An expression of surprise flitted across the handsome features. Then the face was blank for Captain Tony Davies was out before his nerveless body touched ground.

Teacum stared at the crumpled body for a moment. Then, as furor arose around him, he realized that he had committed the ultimate in army insubordination. He had struck his superior officer.

He whirled in time to parry the musket stock a soldier swung at his head, and he smashed the face down into the darkness. A gun exploded near at hand, and a ball whirled by his face.

"Don't shoot!" Old Iron Neck's basso voice boomed from afar. "You'll hit someone in the train. Manhandle him."

But Teacum didn't wait to be man-handled. He was into his saddle, and he leaned low as his charger straightened out under his spurs toward the gap in the wagon corral. The sentry's startled face loomed for a second before him, over a leveled gun. It was blotted out as the horse knocked him down and leaped over him.

A scattered shooting blasted the night behind the fleeing trooper, and he felt the breath of a rifle ball on his neck. But he didn't look back. His mind was still in a nightmare sloth of confusion. He couldn't know what these people were doing here. But that wasn't important. His job now was to find Hig, and tell him that these wagon people were not Jayhawkers, that they were Confederacy folk. Hig couldn't run off their wagon stock.

His thought was disrupted by a new firing, in the dark to his left. A wild Indian yell drowned the stuttering gunfire, then the quick-drumming of running horses.

It was too late. Hig had already stampeded the wagon stock.

CHAPTER TWO

Treason—An' Be Damned!

THE stars were popping overhead, but clouds veiled the moon and there was little light. It was alkaline soil, however, and pale in the thin starlight. Teacum let his charger out and rode, careless of the prairie dog holes that might break the horse's leg, his own neck. He had to overtake Hig.

He was out of the hollow now, over the ridge and into the dry-rock canyon. He couldn't see the stampeding horses, but he could follow their drumming sound. A cautious voice called to him, but he guessed it was one of the outer guards and he didn't answer. A shot followed the voice, but it went wide.

The moon came out and was radiant in the ragged avenue of sky visible between the canyon's rocked lips above. But it wasn't a moon. It was a radiant face, and the eyes were eager and troubled.

Dick Teacum swore softly, for sight of the face had brought back a million memories to chafe him—of the rigorous but sometimes lazy existence along the old Missoo'; of the horse-racing and the after-

noon rides with Paula Livingston; of the juleps her father, the colonel, used to mix, tall frosted drinks that had no peer in Jackson County.

He remembered also the first excited whisperings of the war that had ended that comfortable way of life; the speculation over where Missouri would fight; the boasts of the Southerners, and the pitched battles with the local abolitionists; the final marching away of the men of Southern families to heed Jeff Davis' call.

The first few months of the war were pleasant in memory—bivouacking through Arkansas's warm countryside to Tennessee in Old Bridles' brigade. The long furloughs and the evenings with Paula in Montgomery.

Then the tempo of the fighting had quickened. There were long, forced marches and blood-red fields, with no more furloughs from the dragging gray army. The food ran out, and shoes, and lucky were those who could strip Union corpses for these military essentials.

It was then Old Bridles' brigade was transferred west to Price, where things were better at the moment than with Hood and Longstreet. It was with Price that Teacum first had met Hig Baker, one of old Sterl's wagonmasters. And it was somewhere below Springfield, on just such a night as this, that a Federal raiding party had penetrated Old Bridles' pickets and stampeded his horses into the Union lines.

Captain Dick Teacum, in charge of the guard that night, was slugged from behind. His pockets next day yielded a hundred dollars in Union paper. His trial before Old Bridles was short as any court-martial in time of war; the verdict was guilty—of treason. Death was mandatory, before the firing squad.

But a friendly guard, Teacum's first lieutenant, allowed him to escape, and he had jumped squarely into the arms of a Federal patrol. For a year after that he had rotted in a prison camp. When, finally, the hard-pressed Yanks offered him his freedom if he would fight with Union troops on the Indian frontier, he had accepted with one idea—to find some way of serving the Confederacy in that Far West country, some way of clearing his name of the blot that had fallen upon it.

And now, just when the dream of a year was about to be realized, Old Bridles and

his daughter appeared suddenly in the middle of the American desert with a train of Oregon pilgrims—Old Bridles, who ought to be with Price.

The canyon turned ahead, shutting out the moon. Teacum's horse shied, jumped suddenly, tripped, and went down. The trooper landed clear, but the stabbing pains in his shoulder told him he had wrenched it. He staggered to his feet and caught his horse by a trailing rein as it regained its feet. Then he turned to see what had caused the accident.

He saw a long, dark figure, lumpy and big, cross-wise of the narrow trail. It was a horse. A smaller figure, sensed rather than seen, would be the rider.

Staking his horse, he walked over and knelt beside the lumpy figure. The horse was dead, its head under it. Shot, probably. The rider, he could see, was pinned underneath. He struck a lucifer and bent low to see the face, then swore in dismal surprise.

That face, small and young and pinched, belonged to Lenny Livingston, Old Bridles' only son, Paula's only brother. Teacum hadn't seen him in years. But he couldn't mistake the face. The kid must have been on the night Lerd, and, hard-headed as his father, he had tried to follow the raiders—alone.

Just like a damn Livingston, Teacum reflected unhappily, feeling for the youngster's heart. There was life in the supple young body, but it might not be for long if he didn't get Lenny from under the horse.

He pulled on the shoulders, but the whole dead weight of the horse was on the youth's under leg, and Teacum's own shoulder hurt with lifting. If he had a rope, his own horse might drag the dead animal off the kid. He had no rope. But maybe the dead horse's bridle reins would do it.

He was bending over the dead beast to unfasten the reins when his body froze, alert. For he could hear the pounding of hoofs in the canyon above him. For the first time since seeing Paula in the wagon corral, Teacum remembered the garrison horses he was to have driven off. He hadn't done it—and here came the bluecoats.

HE TURNED swiftly toward his horse, but his eye fell on the dark heap squarely across the trail. His own horse had stumbled and fallen over the

kid. If fifty riders did the same, Lenny Livingston wouldn't do for mincemeat.

The trooper felt for his gun. Maybe a shot ahead would slow the bluecoats down. But his gun was gone, lost somewhere in the fall, and there was no time to look for it. He could yell, but that would only bring the cavalry down faster.

Teacum knew too well what awaited him if he was taken now. Davies would have come around by this time, and the drunken guard would be discovered. Another court-martial, and another firing squad. The perpendicular walls of the canyon offered his only escape. If he took that way, he'd have to hurry. But there was the kid—

The trooper stood a short moment in indecision. Then he shrugged. Well, hell! He walked around the dead horse and half ran up the hill.

"Halt up there!" he called so loud it hurt his throat. "Hold up, Yanks!"

His voice sounded loud in his own ears, but the thundering of a hundred hoofs in the narrow box canyon was louder, and the cavalymen seemed not to hear. The sound came nearer, and in another minute, dark bobbing forms of horses materialized out of the night, to bear down upon the horseless trooper. He yelled and waved his hands. But it was like waving them at the wind. The Yanks had no ears.

The lead horse was upon him, and Teacum had no place to go. He leaped toward the charging form, and his clawing hands found the martingale strap along the horse's breast. There he hung precariously, the horse's front feet trampling his dragging feet. The trooper aboard the pitching animal cursed in surprise and choked a startled command, then leaned low to club Teacum's head with his pistol barrel. But Teacum held on until the horse had stopped. Then he dropped weakly to the ground.

The dark world swirled about his head, and the lucifer in the hand of the man who stooped over him formed a complete circle of fire. Then the universe became steady again, and the beaten trooper could see other men crowding around him, hear their voices.

The dying flame of the tiny flare lighted up Captain Tony Davies' handsome, still-scared face; and the officer dragged the prone soldier to his feet.

"Galve Teacum, is it?" the captain said

with triumph in his voice. "Well, this is right fine. Old Iron Neck will be powerful glad to see you, Galve. He's already named the firing squad."

Teacum spat dirt and blood, and coughed. "There's a pilgrim kid just down the trail," he choked. "His horse is on him."

"We'll find out about that, Reb," the Yank snapped. "Take him back to the post, Sergeant Cole. Take Pease and Handley with you. The rest of us will reconnoiter down the trail. And, Sergeant—if you find it necessary to take—ah, disciplinary measures on the way, you will find your officers understanding. Only one thing—remember the colonel wants him alive. Old Iron Neck has a question or two to ask him. Yes, sir. He sure does."

Teacum was lifted roughly to a horse, behind the man named Handley, and his hands were laced around that trooper's middle. Handley then led off, the others bringing up the rear.

It was a pain-filled ride for Dick Teacum back to Aspenhut in the dark, with no stirrups to ease the jolting of the horse, with his hands helpless and his head bursting from the pistol-whipping Davies had given him. His whole body hurt like a toothache, and his mouth tasted blood. . . .

Iron Neck was too busy that night to question his prisoner, and Teacum was lodged in the guardhouse, under the malevolent eye of a hard-cheeked blue-coat. No food nor drink was offered him, and no attention was given his wounds. Closing his eyes gave him some relief from the throbbing in his head, and he must have fallen asleep, for the next he knew a guard was shaking him to waken him.

He moaned groggily, and felt himself jerked to his feet. Opening his eyes, he saw the sergeant who had brought him in the night before. Without speaking a word of any kind, the non-com ripped the regulation buttons from Teacum's torn blue uniform, then motioned two guards in the doorway. They came in, prodded the prisoner through the door and marched him toward general headquarters, a sturdy log cabin in the center of the square.

OLD IRON NECK IVY was every inch a soldier. Even his enemies in the service admitted that. Short and stocky of frame, he was hard of eye

and chin, with flowing black side-whiskers and a corrosive tongue in his head. An old wound had rendered his neck rigid on his shoulders, making it necessary for him to wheel his whole body about in order to turn his head. This lent a rather terrifying stolidness to his naturally stern decorum, and accounted for his name.

He was seated at his unplanned pine table when Teacum entered, and he received the prisoner in great silence. The guards seated Teacum, unbidden, in a chair opposite the stone-faced commandant, then took stiff positions behind him.

Teacum stared at the crusty commandant and noted that never had he seen Old Iron Neck so ominously calm.

"Private Teacum," the commandant began, his voice a controlled monotone, "there are five charges against you, and others in the making. For your information, these are high treason, conspiracy to sabotage the Army of the United States, conspiracy to plunder a wagon train, insubordination and attempted homicide. The latter charge may change, depending upon whether Colonel Livingston's boy lives or dies. If he dies, the charge will be murder. Not that it matters a great deal, however, as any of the other four charges would justify sending you to the wall without trial. Am I clear?"

The colonel, was, Teacum admitted to himself, all too clear. He nodded woodenly. It hadn't occurred to him that they would blame him for Lenny Livingston, and he knew it was no good trying to explain that helping the kid was the thing that had led to his being taken. But the irony of it tightened his lips against his teeth.

"But—" the commandant hurled himself backward in his chair and scuffed his spurs along the unplanned floor—"this isn't a hearing. All that will come. What I want to know—and you'll tell me, Private Teacum—is where do your horse-stealing compatriots hold out? And where are the horses belonging to them pilgrims down yonder and to Washakie's Shoshones?"

Teacum started. "Washakie's Shoshones?"

"Washakie's Shoshones," the commandant affirmed, leaning forward to fix Teacum with his eye. "Don't suppose for a minute, Teacum, that I am not in touch with Washakie. He is a good scout, and friendly. And since he controls this coun-

try from South Pass to Salt Lake, his friendly attitude is the only reason Aspenhutz hasn't been torn down and scattered clean to Bear River. I am in constant contact with him, and he has been losing horses all summer."

Teacum started to his feet, but the guards pulled him back into his chair. "We've taken no Indian horses," he blurted. "Indian cayuses would be no account for military service."

"Military service, Teacum?" Iron Neck asked, leaning back in his chair and smiling faintly. "Damned int'resting. Do tell."

Teacum flushed, seeing how he had taken the commandant's bait. The old man had had no concrete evidence. But now Teacum had admitted his guilt. Suddenly he was quiet inside, quiet and cold. In his new-found calmness, he no longer feared this stiff-necked Yank who sat opposite him.

"All right, Colonel, you trapped me," he said bitterly. "So I'll talk. And since you'll shoot me anyhow, I'll tell you a bunch of things you don't want to hear. I'm a rebel, sure, an' proud of it. You knew I was when you took me in here. You knew I was of the South, and that I was loyal enough to my people to fight for their cause.

"I can see now, Colonel, why you Yanks have muffed this war. You're so hard up for man-power, you take a man who's already shed his blood for your enemy's cause an' torture him in your pig-pen prison camps till he agrees to fight against his own outfit just for a meal and a bath. You take him as a soldier, knowin' he hates your guts an' will knife you first chance he gets. You buy your men cheap, Iron Neck. An' you get what you pay for."

The trooper's voice was low and steady, and he poured out the contempt that had festered inside him for a year.

"To hell with you, Colonel. I got different ideas about being a soldier. I go the whole way for my outfit. An' this isn't my outfit. When the Yanks at the prison camp offered me a chance to join up out here, I took it. But I didn't take it just to get myself out of their stinkin' hole back there. I took it on the strength that it might give me a chance to do something for my outfit. And when Hig—when a man came along with a commission to help supply horses to the Confederacy, I took it."

The colonel's eyes were narrowed and

shrewd, and he preserved his military calm. He drummed the table with restless fingers. "It used to be, Teacum, that the uniform a man wore meant something. Treason is bad enough for anyone. For a man in uniform—"

"Treason an' be damned!" Teacum retorted. "I suppose you Yanks haven't got your men in the South, wearin' the gray. In a fuss like this one, Colonel, a traitor is just the man that picks the wrong side. If his outfit wins, he's a patriot and a hero. Don't call me a traitor till Jeff Davis is licked. Save that for Livingston. He's runnin' from the Federals. I'm fightin' you. Save it for your own little boy blues. They'd turn tail an' run over each other if Price's drums sounded down the Platte."

Iron Neck leaned forward again, his eyes and face a mask. "You don't have to tell me how bad my troops are, Teacum. My job is to guard the Oregon Road and the telegraph through this country. I didn't pick my soldiers. 'Course, I'd rather had regulars. By they're all busy back East. I had to take what was given me. Even Galvanized Yanks and West Pointers not dry behind the ears. One's as dependable as the other. But let me worry about that. You haven't told me where I can find those horses."

"Sorry, Colonel," Teacum said truthfully, "I can't help you. And I wouldn't if I could. It would be treason, 'gainst my country."

Old Iron Neck's eyes were suddenly cold and bright. "I hope you don't underestimate the seriousness of this Washakie business," he mentioned. "I don't like to sweat a man, but I've done it. And I'll get to the bottom of this affair if I have to peel every inch of hide off your back. Washakie has been losin' horses for weeks, and he suspects the raiders are whites. I've talked him out of it this long, made him think it was his old enemy, Red Cloud, from the Powder. But once he finds out it is whites, this whole country will blow up in the white man's face. And I might as well have five men as fifty, if Washakie puts on his war paint.

"Whites have a way of looking all the same to an Indian, Teacum. No soldier, no emigrant, no horse thief will be safe west of the Mississippi. The Sioux and the Cheyenne and the Comanches are restless.

Once Washakie is off, they will be off. The whole country will go up in smoke. . . . So, it looks like treason after all, don't it, Private Teacum? Treason against the South as well as the North."

Teacum shrugged. "I've told you, Colonel, I've had no hand in raidin' Washakie."

Iron Neck scowled and lost his military calm. "Still the reb patriot, eh, Teacum? Thinking only of the Confederacy, your beloved South. Huh! Open the door, Bosler."

A GUARD stepped to the door that opened into the commandant's living quarters and swung it wide. In that doorway stood old Livingston and Paula. Both looked at the trooper as if he were a crawling thing.

The Aspenhut commandant stood up. "Ever seen this trooper before, Colonel Livingston?"

There was a silence, longer than any Teacum had ever sat through. Then the old Confederate spoke. "I've seen him, yes. I'm not proud of it, Colonel Ivy, but he served me once in the Provisional Army as captain of dragoons. Served me until we caught him running off our horses and selling them to the Union."

Each word burned into Teacum like a heated iron, and he hated the Livingstons, hated them more for having loved them.

Old Iron Neck cleared his throat. "That's all. And, Livingston, you may join Davies on his afternoon ride to scout for the horses, as you requested. Private Teacum, unfortunately, refuses to talk. Drastic measures will be necessary, I'm afraid."

The guard closed the door, shutting out the accusing eyes.

"Take the prisoner back to the guard-house," the colonel ordered wearily. "And double the guard. Prepare the stocks for a whipping, also."

Teacum was wrenched roughly from his chair and marched outside between the wooden-soldier guards. The colonel's mare, a beautiful dark bay thoroughbred, was tied to the peeled log tie post in front of the headquarters building. There was nothing to lose. Teacum made a quick decision.

The guards were looking straight ahead, and their bayoneted guns were dressed correctly on their shoulders. Teacum threw one foot sideways to trip up the guard on

his right, stumbling into him at the same time. As that wooden-faced warrior went down, the captive whirled and drove a hard right at the other parading guard's jaw. He also went down, his gun still balanced on his shoulder. The first guard was coming up, muttering ominously, raising his gun. Teacum swung a heavy-booted kick squarely into his face, then turned and jumped toward the colonel's mare.

It was as easy as that, and it illustrated to Teacum's satisfaction the truth of old General Price's axiom: One good reb was worth two Yanks in a tight.

He swung into the saddle from the Indian side and had reached the open gate before the recovering guards had brought their guns to bear. Their balls whistled harmlessly over his head, and the gun of the startled sentry at the post gate discharged as he swung it from his shoulder. The ball barely missed the point of his nose.

The rest of the small garrison, fortunately, was out in the paddocks, preparing for the afternoon ride, and there was nothing west of the Platte that could overtake the colonel's mare with a hundred-yard lead.

Teacum saluted a startled man of the wagon train as he thundered past, and he wondered vaguely whether Paula Livingston might be watching. Not that it mattered now, he told himself. These had been his people once. But they were enemies now—traitors who had abandoned the fight for which he had given the best years of his life.

That was what made a man your enemy, wasn't it?

They deserved the fate he and Hig had planned for the Jayhawkers. They deserved to lose their horses to the cause they had deserted. He would still help Hig south with the contraband cavvy. He cursed himself silently for muffing his part of the original plan. He would have a time explaining that to Hig.

He kept the mare pointed straight west, toward the Piney hills. When well into these dry mounds, with no pursuit visible behind, he circled south to pick up Hig's trail. He wondered whether the guerrillas had brushed the Federal patrol, and if the horse band was still intact.

He remembered then that he was unarmed, save for the colonel's old horse pistol in the saddle boot. He leaned down to touch

it and felt reassured. A horse pistol, he recalled, could leave a nasty corpse at close range.

It was late afternoon when at last he struck the horse trail. He judged he was twenty miles from the post, and the sign and the spoor were fresh. He reined up suddenly in an open swale meadow and gazed at the trail, puzzled for the moment—because here on the soft turf, it split into five trails, and each took a different direction. Then he grinned. The Yanks must have been pressing Hig, and he had split the cavyv to throw them off.

He turned the mare a little west by south and rode to where no trail led. He knew that all these trails would come together at the Devil's Sink, ten miles beyond.

IT WAS night again when he reined up at the edge of the Sink, a sudden depression in the level prairie. Almost circular in shape, it was walled with white chalk cliffs and looked as if it had been formed when someone set down a giant pan before the earth's surface had crusted. Less than two hundred yards across, it was lined with lush grass and dense underbrush along a hundred springs. It was invisible a quarter of a mile away, and it would conceal a thousand horses in its brush. It was made to order for horse thieves.

The trail before the lone trooper dropped suddenly between the white chalk cliffs, whose flat tops were level with and blended with the prairie. He was urging the mare down the narrow trail when he sensed, rather than heard or saw, the presence of some living thing near at hand. His ears then reported the muffled click of a gun being cocked, and he reined up suddenly. He sat very still, for he knew he would be silhouetted clearly against the moon-lit sky behind him.

"That's right, Yank," a voice growled from the rocks. "Set right where you are, lessen you want what's in this barrel."

Teacum grinned. "It's all right, mister. It's Teacum."

There was a sardonic chuckle; then a dark man-shape emerged from the moon-shadows on the cliff. The thin light glinted on a long rifle barrel. "All right, Teacum, is it?" the man said, "Wal, we'll leave that for Hig to say. Yes, suh. I 'spect we will. He's been wonderin' what's kept you. You'll

find him under an overhang yonder. He's got a fire."

With the guard's humorless chuckle still in his ears, Teacum made his way toward the glow of a small hidden fire.

Hig Baker sat alone at the fire, his legs folded under him, staring into the low-burning flames, silent and fathomless as a Sioux. Tall, gangling, and powerful as a gorilla, the Tennessean raised his spade-bearded face at the sound of footsteps. His black, close-set eyes gleamed as Teacum came into the firelight, and he toyed with a knife.

"Well, it's Teacum," he greeted in his heavy basso voice. He didn't bother to stand. "It took you one hell of a long time to git here, Galve. Where's Old Iron Neck's hosses?"

Teacum squatted beside the powerful guerrilla and was as casual as was possible.

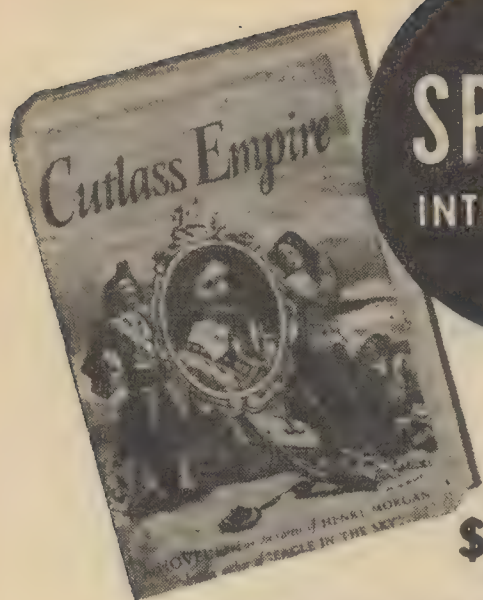
"I didn't bring 'em, Hig," he admitted, thinking rapidly. "I got a jolt out of that wagon camp. Your signal was so slow comin' last night, I rode down to look around. They wasn't Jayhawkers an' Redlegs, like you thought, Hig. They was reb folks right from Jackson County. Old Bloody Bridles Livingston was even there. I got excited an' rode out to find you. Run into the Livingston kid with his horse on top of him, an' when I stopped to try to help him, the Yanks grabbed me. I just shook loose."

Hig Baker toyed with his knife and looked deeply into the fire. "You ain't tellin' me anything I don't know, Galve," he said then, his small eyes glittering. "I shot that kid's horse. Little cuss tried to foller us. An' I know the rest of it, too. Hell, I oughta. I got Ole Bridles hisself back there in the cave. Him an' half a dozen Yanks jumped us this evening, an' we bushed 'em. Killed all the Yanks. But I was plumb glad to see Ole Bridles. Yes, man. Let him live to talk old times with."

Teacum glanced into the shadows of the rear of the cave. There, tied and lying against the wall, was Livingston, his eyes shining in the firelight like a cat's. Teacum caught himself wondering if the old man had heard Baker say it was he who had shot Lenny's horse. Then another thought suggested itself. What the hell difference did it make?

"Do you still feel like we oughten to take the pilgrim's hosses?"

(Continued on page 104)



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(Continued from page 102)

Teacum shook his head. "I didn't know last night that they were rollin' their tails an' leavin' them back East to fight it out alone. I know it now, Hig. So I say Gen'l Price needs their horses worse'n they do."

Baker spat into the fire, and listened for a second to the sizzle. Then he faced Teacum, and his little eyes were cold. "Don't git me wrong, Galve," he grated. "I warn't axin' your advice. I was only studyin' about what I oughta to do with you. Know what I oughta do, all right. I oughta kill you an' leave yore carcass for the flies. Bunglin' that job o' runnin' off the garrison hosses cost me ten o' the best guerrillas that ever slit a throat. An' it puts me a day behind."

Cold malice gleamed in the little pig eyes. "But it puts me short-handed, too, Galve. So, I'll take you along. But ever an' you jump the wrong way, Galvy, an' I'll let you have it. Savvy? Now git some shut-eye. We-all are leavin' this place quick in the mawnin'. You hain't got a gun, have you? Wal, that's fine. Too many guns in a camp is wuss'n not any a-tall."

It became evident to Teacum as he stood there in the dim glow of the fire, that little of the glory for his exploit would be his. Hig Baker was making it clear that it was his show. And Teacum could see no way out now. His bridges were burned, and he didn't even have a respectable gun. Anyhow, help to Price and Jeff Davis was all that mattered. So he turned in silence and pulled his leather from the mare. He turned her out to browse, then drew the old horse pistol from the saddle boot.

He saw that it was loaded, then slid it furtively into his own boot. He found that wearing his trouser leg outside his boot would make it less conspicuous.

CHAPTER THREE

Guerrilla Trap

DAWN comes early on the prairie, and daylight is hard upon it. Teacum ate a silent breakfast with Hig Baker. He was saddling his horse when Hig leaned his back against a boulder near the fire and ordered Livingston brought before him.

"Mawnin', Colonel," Teacum heard the Tennessean say. "Do you like bad news

after your breakfast, or b'fore you eat?"

Receiving no answer, Baker went on. "Time is gettin' short, an' we'll have to cut short our visit. Sorry you couldn't stay longer. But we can still chat a minute. Yeah. Let's start with the time you had me hoss-whipped for insubord'nation. You recollect that, now don't you, Colonel? Whipped with a wagon tug, I was. Wal, Colonel, I've larned since I saw you what insubord'nation looks like. Gonna give you a demonstration, free. Yep, strip 'im boys, an' stake 'im. An' give my regards to the Devil, Colonel."

The guerrilla chieftain motioned toward a big anthill, crawling alive with millions of restless red ants. The guerrillas needed no further order. They knew, from past experience, just what to do.

Teacum rooted where he stood, felt suddenly sick. He knew that death to which Hig Baker was sentencing the old soldier. A man was tied flat on his back across the seething mound, his arms and legs outstretched, to lose in a few minutes his eyes, the interior tissues of his ears, and eventually his mind and life.

Teacum looked toward the old colonel and saw that Bridles was taking the sentence with a quiet and calm dignity. The guards had stripped him to his waist and were marching him toward the crawling mound. His mouth was a thin white line, but there was no other indication of the horror he must feel. His shoulders were erect and square; his gaze was rigid before him.

Teacum found himself reaching for the old horse pistol in his boot, without having the slightest notion of what he would do with it against the twenty armed guerrillas. Then his eye fell on an opened powder key behind a tree not far away. Walking over, unnoticed, he picked up the keg and stepped to the fire.

"We'll all get to hell before you do that to any man, Hig," he announced, holding the open keg directly over the flames. "With a hell of a big noise, at that. Call your dogs off that old man."

Baker's eyes narrowed, and his hand stole toward his big knife. Teacum lowered the powder keg slightly toward the reaching flames, and Hig's hand froze. A long, breathless minute passed, with trooper and guerrilla locked in clashing stare. Old Bridles

stood proud and indifferent to the whole affair.

Baker's manner changed abruptly, and he forced a placating grin. "Now, Galve, don't go an' git yore shirt off. I thought we both owed that ole lizard a party like this. But if you got a idea that's better, why spill it."

Teacum's mind was racing. He knew that Hig was aware of his feeling for Paula Livingston, and he supposed that the guer-rilla was putting him to some sort of test, leaving it to him to name the way in which they would kill Old Bridles. For he understood that they couldn't let him go, to organize further pursuit. Teacum thought of the reasons why he should want to kill the man. But he knew, as he stood there, he would never be able to see the old man killed.

But he was spared the exigency of replying. For there was a crashing in the underbrush, and a wild-faced bush soldier appeared, excited and out of breath.

"Austin repartin', sir," the newcomer gasped, halting before Baker and giving a rough approximation of a salute. "The Yanks has found the hole, sir. Ole Iron Neck an' his column 'ave drew up just whar the trail comes down into the Sink. I think, sir, they're a-fixin' to move in."

Hig Baker cursed the man who had brought the news, then glanced uneasily at Teacum. "Tie the colonel to that tree," he ordered his men, who still stood at either side of the soldier. "Cap'n Teacum an' me will decide later what to do with 'im. Right now we'll take care o' the Yanks. Tie his mouth, there, so he won't be yellin' an' warnin' the bluecoats we're down here for shore."

Speaking quietly then, so his voice wouldn't carry to the rim above him, he ordered his fighting men into the cliffs on both sides of the steep-walled entrance, for an ambush.

"Talbot, you take yore brigade up this side o' the cut," he finished. "Bulger, you an' yore c'tingent take this side. Let 'em all down into the cut 'fore you fire, an' we'll give 'em what is good for Yanks. Cap'n Teacum an' me'll scout the trail from down here, an' don't a man of you fire till I do. Get movin'!

"We'll settle 'bout Bridles later, Cap'n Teacum," he continued to the trooper as

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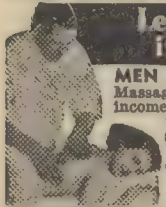
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his men moved off to assume their positions in the rocks. "When we've fixed the Yanks. Smite 'em him an' thigh, an' no warnin'. That's our method, eh, Cap'n? Teacum and Baker. We-all will be the terror o' the border. Quantrell won't hold a candle to us. Come on, down this way."

T EACUM smiled bitterly at the guerrilla's change of manner, and his new title of "Cap'n" with the ragged army. But the danger that threatened Hig Baker threatened him also. So he set down the powder keg he held and followed the guerrilla toward the line of the brush that grew up nearly to the cliffs.

He stumbled over a low exposed root as he stepped into the underbrush, and fell heavily, startling a small band of horses from the cover.

Baker cursed him soundly. "Pick up yore duck feet," he snarled. "An' don't be scarin' any more horses from the brush. You wanna let the Yanks know we-all are down heah?"

But Teacum didn't hear, for he was staring at the horses he had flushed. They weren't emigrant horses. They were painted desert cayuses—Indian horses.

He forgot Livingston tied to the tree behind him and the Yanks on the rim above. He forgot everything but the Indian horses, them and Old Iron Neck's words of the day before.

"What are we doin' with them Indian horses?" he demanded.

Baker turned and regarded him with unfeigned surprise. "Same as we're doin' with any. An' don't yell so damn loud."

Teacum's eyes narrowed. "Gen'l Price has got no use for broomtails, Hig."

The Tennessean shrugged impatiently. "I'm a hoss dealer, Galve. An' them shave-tails'll bring us a good price at the Colorado mines. Now, by heck—"

"Horse dealer?" Teacum echoed, a new suspicion stirring inside him. "Then maybe you ain't takin' any o' these horses to Price."

"To hell with Price!" Baker growled. "The Yanks up there on the rim are our worry now."

The big man turned to enter the brush, but something in Teacum's eyes held him.

REBEL HORSES SOUTH

The man in tattered blue was moving slowly toward him, his eyes like steel.

In that moment Teacum had felt his entire world crumble about him. In that moment he saw that Old Iron Neck had been right from the first. Hig Baker was no Confederate agent. He was just a horse thief. Dick Teacum was also just a horse thief—a horse thief and a traitor.

He was close to the guerrilla chieftain now. "So you're a horse dealer, Hig," he accused, his voice low and unhurried. "Maybe you were dealin' in horses back at Springfield, the night the Yanks stampeded our cavalry stock. Maybe you hit me on the head that night an' put the Yankee money in my pocket to make it look like I was the dealer."

Hig Baker's eyes had become as still and as sharp as the eyes of a snake. "Don't be a damn fool all yore life, Galve. Shore these hosses ain't for Price. An' maybe I did stampede them hosses at Springfield. So what? This is a hell of a time to think of it. The Yanks up there wanna see you bad as they wanna see me. So we better git going."

Teacum felt hollow inside. But his rage boiled up, rage and hate for the man who had branded him as a traitor and deserter, first with the gray, now with the blue. It didn't matter now for him which way the war went. He would be a wanted man whichever it was.

Senselessly then, in his rage, he hurled himself at the spade-bearded giant. He was neither Federal nor rebel now. He was a man alone, striking at the force which had brought him disgrace and ruin. And he was stronger and far more dangerous than a man who fights for a theoretical cause, detached from himself, for his cause was himself, and his only aim was to kill.

The surprise and the fury of his attack threw Hig Baker off balance, and Teacum's fist flattened the guerrilla's beaked nose, drew back and smashed into his open mouth. But the fury that made his attack invincible made him also vulnerable to the guile and strength of the other. For, where a cool head would have kept him back beyond the reach of the Tennessean's iron-muscle arms, his blind fury drew him in against the big chest, toward the thick, hairy neck, that he might choke the life from it.

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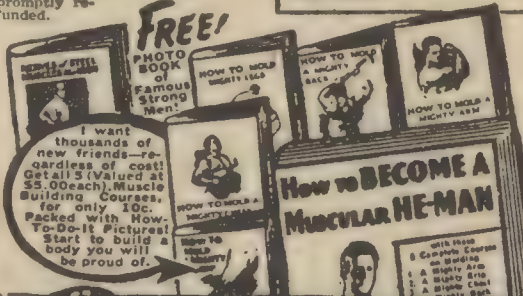
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FIFTEEN WESTERN TALES

This was what Baker had waited for. His thick arms closed around the trooper and smashed the smaller man against his own barrel chest in a crushing hug.

Teacum felt his lungs compressed against his ribs, felt his life being crushed from him. Throwing himself, he brought a knee up into the bearded man's stomach, heard him grunt and felt the pressure released from his lungs. But as he staggered backward, Baker sent a smashing uppercut to his jaw, a blow that hurled the trooper ten feet and sprawled him, half-sitting, against a tree. When Teacum next saw the guerilla, he was drawing back his right hand. His big, two-edged knife flashed between his thick fingers.

Teacum remembered then the old horse pistol in his boot. He dug for it, found it, had it half raised when Hig's arm made a quick throwing motion. He felt a searing pain in his shoulder, and reflex tightened his fingers on the big gun grips. The old pistol exploded in his hand with all the detonation and repercussion of a field piece.

Hig Baker stood, for a second longer, erect. Then he collapsed all at once and lay still.

Pulling the knife from his flesh with both hands, Teacum reloaded the old war piece and charged the guerrillas in the rocks. Blinded to everything but his desire to kill all that stood for Hig Baker, he charged openly, without thought for cover. He fired the old pistol with both hands. Fired again and again, pausing only to reload. He saw two men almost decapitated by it, saw others break and run from his flanking attack. Then something struck his head. Fire shapes danced before his eyes. Then blackness—oblivion.

AS A dreamer sometimes is half conscious, but unable to distinguish reality from the horror of his dream, so Teacum lay for what seemed an eternal time. He knew, from his rational moments, that he was in a real bed, the first one in years. He knew he was burning with fever, and that his head throbbed maddeningly.

But there reality seemed to end.

Sometimes the droning in his ears was a big fly outside his window. Sometimes it was voices. Faces came at him from the

REBEL HORSES SOUTH

walls, ghost faces of men long dead. Once, Old Bloody Bridles and Iron Neck were among them. Then it was Paula, and her eyes were no longer haunted.

Then, gradually, reality conquered. The cloud lifted from his brain.

Paula was there, her eyes radiant. She sat by his bed and her hand was on his forehead.

It felt moist and cool.

Old Bridles was there, standing, and his tough old features were smiling. Lenny was there, his leg in splints, but smiling also as he thanked Teacum for having saved his life.

"Here he comes, all right," the old rebel warrior was saying. "Takes more than a knife in the ribs an' a rifle ball on the skull to put a hard-headed reb out o' the scrap. Old Sterl Price would of been proud of you, boy. You made more noise with that old horse pistol than all Pope's cannons at Bull Run. You warned the Yanks there was danger ahead, and opened the enemy to attack.

"Iron Neck is proud of you, too, boy. He entered your name in the register today, for penetratin' the enemy lines an' layin them open for attack. Says he hates to lose you. But the reg'lars are comin', and he's got orders to discharge all volunteers."

Teacum's gaze was blank, and his head hurt worse as he tried to draw sense from the old man's words.

"Reg'lars?"

"I keep forgettin' you don't know," Livingston went on. "About the war, I mean. She's over, boy. Lee's surrendered, an' Lincoln's been shot. Johnson is president. With old Abe dead and the carpet-baggers movin' in, we-all reckoned we'd better move on West while we could."

"War over?"

"Yep. Weeks ago, boy. I didn't savvy that you didn't know, till Iron Neck announced it first time to his garrison this mornin'. He told me later that he got the word all right when it ended, but he knew it would take a good while to get the reg'lars out here to relieve the volunteers, an' he was 'feered the temporaries would desert him an' go back home if they found out, with them enlisted only for the duration of the war.

"Connor's volunteers back at Fort Lara-

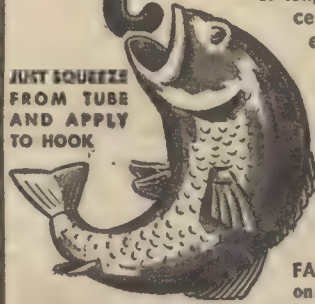
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FIFTEEN WESTERN TALES

mie revolted soon as they heard it was all over, an' old Ed had to turn his cannon on them to keep them in line. Iron Neck says that with things lookin' bad with Washakie an' all out here, he figgered he'd best keep mum about it till the regs were on their way."

The news made Teacum dizzy all over again. "War over," he repeated hollowly. "Lincoln shot. Lee surrendered. Then—then there ain't any more Confederacy, is there? Hig Baker must have known that. And he was usin' me, knowin' that Iron Neck hadn't told us here at Aspenhut. But why didn't you tell me, Colonel? Shore, you heard me an' Hig talkin' about takin' horses through to Price."

There was a silence.

"Yep, I heard," Livingston admitted. "But I didn't savvy then. 'Cause Price didn't surrender, Dick. Nope, Old Sterl took them in his army that didn't want to live in a Yank country an' went into Mexico. An' I thought maybe you an' Hig had some fool idee in your heads to go down an' join him an' raise hell.

"But if it was treason you did, boy, it was damn good treason, an' first class service to the country. An' Old Iron Neck is grateful. Says it's funny, but the best soldier he had was a reb. He'd never have nailed Hig's guerrillas at all if he hadn't had you."

Teacum had only one more question. "The horses—"

Old Bloody Bridles chuckled again. "The horses are all right, boy. Washakie has his, an' we got ours. We're just waitin' now, for you to get your complexion back 'fore goin' on. We thought that long as you're not in the army any more, you might like to go to Oregon with us. Plenty o' ground out there to start again. And it might give me time to make up for what I did to you back at Springfield when Hig stole my horses—

"Steady, boy. Steady there. You're a sick man. An' there ain't any hurry. You see, Paula an' Lenny an' me only got one wagon, an' we can't be takin' any outsiders in. Thought we'd wait till the regs come. There's a chaplain due in with them, an' four won't make a very big family. . . . Now don't take on so, Paula. It was your idee."

LAST GUN TO OGALLALA

(Continued from page 76)

sight among the first buildings of the trail town.

Aunt Mary came to her side, but Linda said, "Let's start supper."

She said to Aunt Mary, "You needn't spare the sugar and cinnamon tonight, Aunt. For once let's have rice pudding with some life to it. We can stock up again tomorrow at Ogallala, you know."

She did not look toward Ogallala as she worked and talked, but always she was waiting and listening with an intensity that made her realize her whole life had led up to this moment. She had never believed she could love with such a passion, and she knew she could never again love so completely.

Dusk deepened. Dingy, yellow lamplight flickered from the windows of Ogallala across the Platte. She heard the faint refrain of a hurdy-gurdy. The last stirring of the day's hot wind rippled her hair.

And Ogallala lay silent. There was only the hard pound of her own pulse.

Then the shooting came in a swift, tripphammer tattoo that shattered the quiet shockingly. Then it was over and the silence was back again, heavier than ever.

Linda stood an instant looking toward Ogallala. Still etched sharply in her memory was the picture of the reflection of gun flashes that had flickered like heat lightning above the rooftops.

Then she began running wildly, heedlessly toward the river. Aunt Mary followed, calling to her, but she did not hear.

She reached the Platte and waded into the shallows, her skirt hem growing heavy with water and clinging to her ankles. She was hurrying to Ogallala.

Then she stopped and stood with the stream's current tugging at her legs, for a rider had emerged from the town.

He loped to the river, and rode through the shallows toward her. Spray from the splashing hoofs of his mount flashed silver in the faint light.

It was Clay. He scooped her up into his arms, and she lay there limp and spent.

He kissed her. "It's all right," he said. "I gave my gun to Cass to pack in the wagon. I won't need it any more, I hope."

The last of his youth was gone, but so was his wildness. She was content to depend on his strength—and his decisions.

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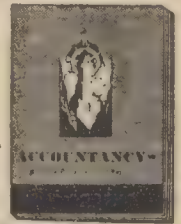
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FIFTEEN WESTERN TALES

(Continued from page 90)

George was picking thistles out of his bedroll when Spide Core came over. "Bring your cows along when you're ready, Taylor. Don't expect me to ride herd on them. Nothing in the world so blind as a rodeo time-keeper," he added bitterly.

George chuckled and went on picking thistles out of his bedding. "George," Spide asked narrowly, "when'd you start making crazy bets? Them two have been slugging it out for years. But you never went on the butt over it before."

"You needled me into it, I reckon."

For the first time in George Taylor's memory, Spide Core smiled. It was like melting sunlight on a winter creek. He said, "That was the bravest thing I ever saw a man do, George."

"Well—Joe's quite a boy," George said.

"I don't mean Joe. I mean you. That ankle never hurt Joe like it's hurt you. And yet you pushed him into riding today with everything you could lay hand to. He'd never have beat my boy out, if you hadn't him boiling mad."

George shook his head. "I just made the suggestion. Joe did the rest."

"I don't expect to figure out why you did it," Spide told him, "but I allow it wasn't for winter pasture. You could have bought that. It must have been for something you couldn't buy."

George said, "Maybe it was, Spide," and that was all.

In a burgundy sunset, he and Joe started home. The boy was quiet, but there was a thoughtful tuck about his eyes.

"Why didn't you ever tell me about the bronc that set on you?" he asked.

"Nothing so dull as somebody else's fracture," George said.

"Doc was telling me it almost finished you for riding. He said you wouldn't ride anything under twenty years old for the next five years."

"Not if I could help it. But those things work out."

"A little faster," Joe declared, "if you don't get in the habit of favoring them, eh? Tell you what—let's get over there tomorrow and take another crack at that yellow bull!"

"Why not?" George smiled. "All you've got to do is dog him down, Joe."

FAST TROUBLE MAN

(Continued from page 43)

Frank shook him off. But he was blinded now from his cuts, and hurt. He was only up as far as his knees when the kid jumped back at him, giving him the boots again.

Frank was tough. The punishment he took would have killed an ordinary man. And Frank wasn't too far from the line when I finally stopped it. Arm and collar bone broke, and shoulder out of joint, and his face not like a face at all. The kid was plumb kill-crazy, and would have finished him, I think. But I stepped in, like I'd done that other time.

"That's enough, boy," I said to Hack. "You've grinded him. You don't want to stretch a rope, do you?"

"All right," he said. "Heave 'im up on that wagon. But ever I ketch him off it 'til we're back to Hoe, I'll give 'im more the same. He lifts a gun at me, I'll shoot 'im so dead he'll stink before he hits the ground."

Well, it's as hard to believe looking back on it as it was right at the time. But that horny kid took over the horse drive and bossed it from there on, and I don't recall anybody ever disputing his authority.

He kept Grinder on that wagon, too, tying into him again whenever Frank sneaked off for any purpose whatsoever. Frank was too bad hurt to fight again, and we kept all the guns away from him, not wanting any worse trouble than we'd had. And that Hackett didn't spare him any.

It kind of shamed us all to see a big lug like Frank scurry back for the wagon whenever Hack caught him off it and spoke to him. But nobody butted in.

By the time we'd hit Fort Hall, Frank'd had enough. He just dropped out of sight one night, and when a search didn't turn him up, we went on without him. He never did show his face on the Nowood any more, and didn't even write for his personal belongings and back pay. I heard years later that he was nailing packing boxes for a mercantile concern in Salt Lake City, but I never did see him again.

But I used to think of some the things he'd said, and marvel at how right he'd been.

I mean about there being nothing you could do for some of them but just stomp them out.

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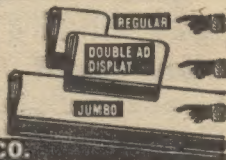
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(Continued from page 67)

Sam he shook his head. "Go to blazes," he says.

Hawkins grinned again, like he thought he'd hear another tune in a minute. He reached for the end of the iron, and picked it up. Then he yelled like a branded calf, dropped the iron and hunched over with his right hand around his left wrist. The iron was charrin' the rug by his feet, and his six-gun was layin' beside it.

When I looked up, Jim he was halfway across the room, hoppin' like a rabbit with the chair on his back. He piled into Hawkins and they both fetched up against the fireplace. I could feel the jar when they hit together.

Hawkins was still yellin', tryin' to get at his gun. Jim he'd broke one of the legs of his chair and got a foot loose. He kicked Hawkins very neat under the jaw, and then he started working the rest of the ropes off of him. That was all there was to it.

Yes sir, that's the way it happened. Jim he worked hisself loose and untied Miss Rose and me. He splashed a little water on Miss Rose, and tied up Hawkins, whilst Miss Rose put salve on her Pa's face.

Old Sam he kept sort of clearing his throat now and then, and in between he'd blow his nose. That was when I first knowed Sam was gettin' old. He had something on his mind, and he didn't dast say it.

After a while he looked at Jim and he says, kind of gruff, "I seen it, but I don't understand it. Maybe you can explain it to me."

"Sure," says Jim. "The handle of that iron was near as hot as the business end when he picked it up. Silver conducts heat better than iron. Anybody that works with metals would know that." He looked like he was going to go on, maybe about how Hawkins, being nothing but a dumb cow-chouser, didn't know it. But thought twice, and shut up.

Old Sam he kept quiet a little longer, and then he says, "I apologize," kinda sheepish like.

That would of been enough to of floored me, but it wasn't good enough for Jim. "You apologize, what?" he says, smiling at the old man.

"Son," says old Sam, kind of unwilling. But then he looked like he might—just maybe—learn to like the sound of it.

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CHRONOGRAPH WRIST WATCH



Lifetime Guarantee (EXCLUSIVE OF PARTS)

3 DIALS—5 HANDS—2 BUTTONS

Multi-purpose watch that measures distance, speed, time, moving objects. Used as Stop Watch or Timepiece. Has Sweep-Second Hand for full 60 Second count. Second Dial records up to 45 minutes. Third Dial then records up to 6 hours.

INDEPENDENT MOVEMENTS

For sportsmen, professional men and women—timekeeper works when other hands and dials are stopped—separate movements permit dual use at same time.

RUGGED CONSTRUCTION

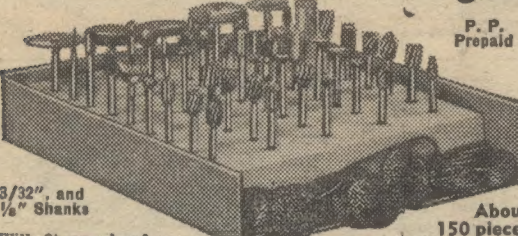
Precision workmanship and shock resistant features are added to enhance the value of this watch. Sold everywhere for as high as \$17.00. Our low introductory price is only \$7.50 plus 10% tax. (Total \$8.25.) Send check or money order and we prepay postage. Or sent C.O.D. plus charges. **LIMITED STOCK!**

\$7.50 Plus Tax

MARDO SALES CORP., 480 Lexington Ave., New York 17, N. Y. Dept. C-529

Look—HOBBYISTS—get this Sensational ARBOR TOOL SET

A value of \$30.00—Money Refunded if not completely satisfied—First quality **\$6.95**



P. P. Prepaid

About 150 pieces

Will fit any hand tools such as Dremel, Kasco, Handie, or drills up to 1/4"—Buy several sets. The greatest value we have ever offered in our 15 years in business. Only possible because we bought out a factory of their complete line of burrs. If the tools were bought separately in Hobby shops, you would pay more than \$30 at the regular prices. The tools have a value of 35c to \$2 each, and include burrs, saws, drills, routers, carvers, emery discs, reamers, borer, shapers, grinding points. Also a 60c heavy duty mandrel.

Send check or money order to Dept. F.G.

GENERAL AIRE CO.

447 W. NORRIS ST.

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**BUILD A FINE BUSINESS
FULL OR SPARE
TIME!**



**Slip On
Slip Off!**



THE SIGN OF VALUE!

Good Housekeeping Guarantee Seal on Velvet-eez Air-Cushioned Insole shoes shows your customers they can't lose a dime! Send Coupon Today!

FOLLOW THIS MAN TO CASH!

"For the past four years, my average total weekly earnings have been around \$80.00 per week—I couldn't have done it except for the liberal commissions paid by the company on this wonderful line of shoes and garments that really is above and beyond competition."

Charles Tuttle.



THIS BRINGS FREE OUTFIT!

Mason Shoe Mfg. Co.
Dept. M-690
Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

Rush me your free selling outfit, including sensational Air-Cooled Genuine Nylon Mesh Shoe, 5-second Velvet-eez demonstrator, exciting new women's line, and garments that can bring me big, extra cash with a little extra effort. Send everything FREE AND PREPAID.

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Address
City and State.....

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NEW NYLON MESH FAST-SELLER...
MAKE MONEY
FROM THE FIRST
HOUR!

FREE SELLING OUTFIT

Call on neighbors and friends all around home—show and sell amazing **NEW KIND OF SHOE!** Hidden elastic in front makes it easy to **SLIP-ON, SLIP-OFF**—No more broken laces, no more wrinkled tongues!

Just Blow through this shoe! Popular, fast selling Air-Cooled feature with Genuine Nylon Mesh brings you quick orders easy as ABC! Make up to \$3.00 easy advance commission on every order you take—start in spare time if you prefer!

**BETTER THAN A RETAIL SHOE
STORE OF YOUR OWN**

You can satisfy nearly every man and woman in your territory with over 160 dress, work, sport styles of the nation's finest **COMFORT** shoes! Offer your customers biggest selection. Fit them all **SIMPLY, CORRECTLY** with easy accurate methods. Draw on stock of 150,000 pairs—give real satisfaction.

**WE SHOW YOU HOW
TO SELL QUICK**

You get big selling outfit, with Tested and Proved ways to make sales from the first hour you work! You get booklet of ideas written by 5,000 successful salesmen—"automatic" door openers—"magic" selling words—everything to make it easy for you to sell and make big money! Big ads in popular National magazines make you known as the expert Mason shoe fitter in your community.

**GREAT WOMEN'S LINE LIKE
A BIG EXTRA FACTORY!**



Scores of styles! Fast-Selling beauties in blue, green, red, tan, grey brown, black and white bring you plenty of extra orders from housewives, waitresses, school girls, office girls, teen-agers—every home and office means you can sell to both men and women. This sensational Velvet-eez Casual, sizes 4-10, widths AA to EEE wanted by women from 18 to 60! High fashioned shoe brings restful relief on Cushion Insole that brings your customers back for more!

**Velvet-eez AIR CUSHION
SELLS SHOES FAST!**

You just say: "Feel that Cushion." When they do—THEY WANT. THEY BUY! Thousands of tiny air bubbles give new comfort to aching feet. Rush name for FREE Selling Outfit today!



MASON SHOE MFG. CO.

Dpt. M-690, Chippewa Falls, Wis.

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All the Delights of Love

but demanded a price no man could pay!

MORGAN BRITTANY was ravishingly lovely, and she taught the art of love to young Ross Pary as no other woman had done before—but a devil lurked behind her angelic beauty! When Ross fled from her ruthless ways to the arms of other women, Morgan swore to ruin his life—or end it—rather than share him with another!

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THE YEAR'S BIG
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AUTHOR OF "THE FOXES
OF HARROW"!



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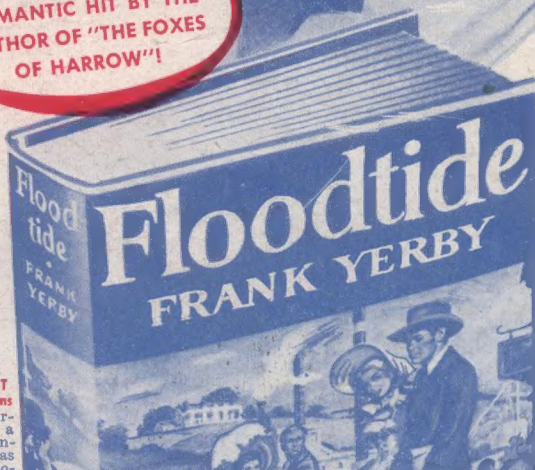
On her wedding night, the bride fell in love with a total stranger! By the author of *Dinner at Antoine's*!

THE INFINITE WOMAN
Edison Marshall

This beautiful, passionate dancer scandalized all Europe with her pagan cult of love! By the author of *Yankee Pasha*!

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Nice people saw Gurdon Stockwell as a pillar of virtue, until his secret life was laid bare—then violence exploded.



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